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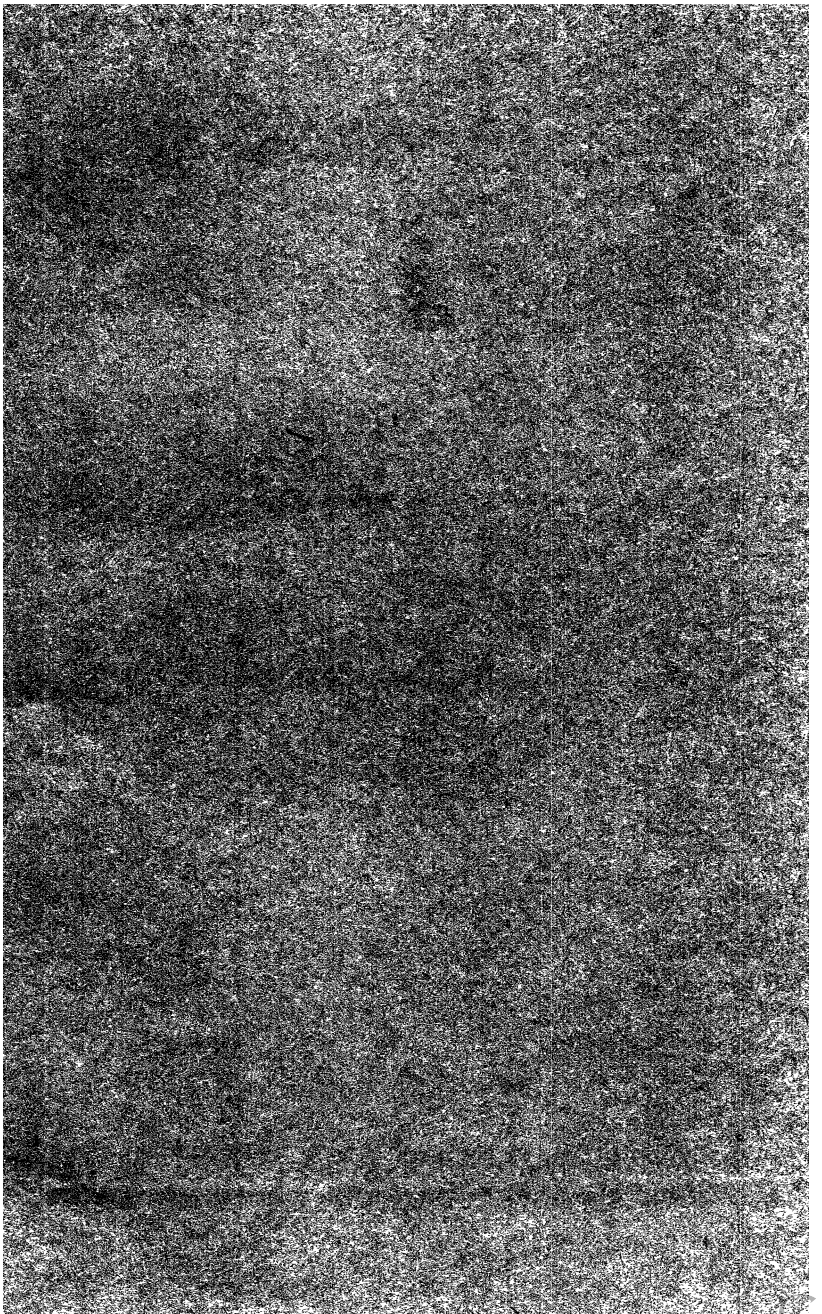
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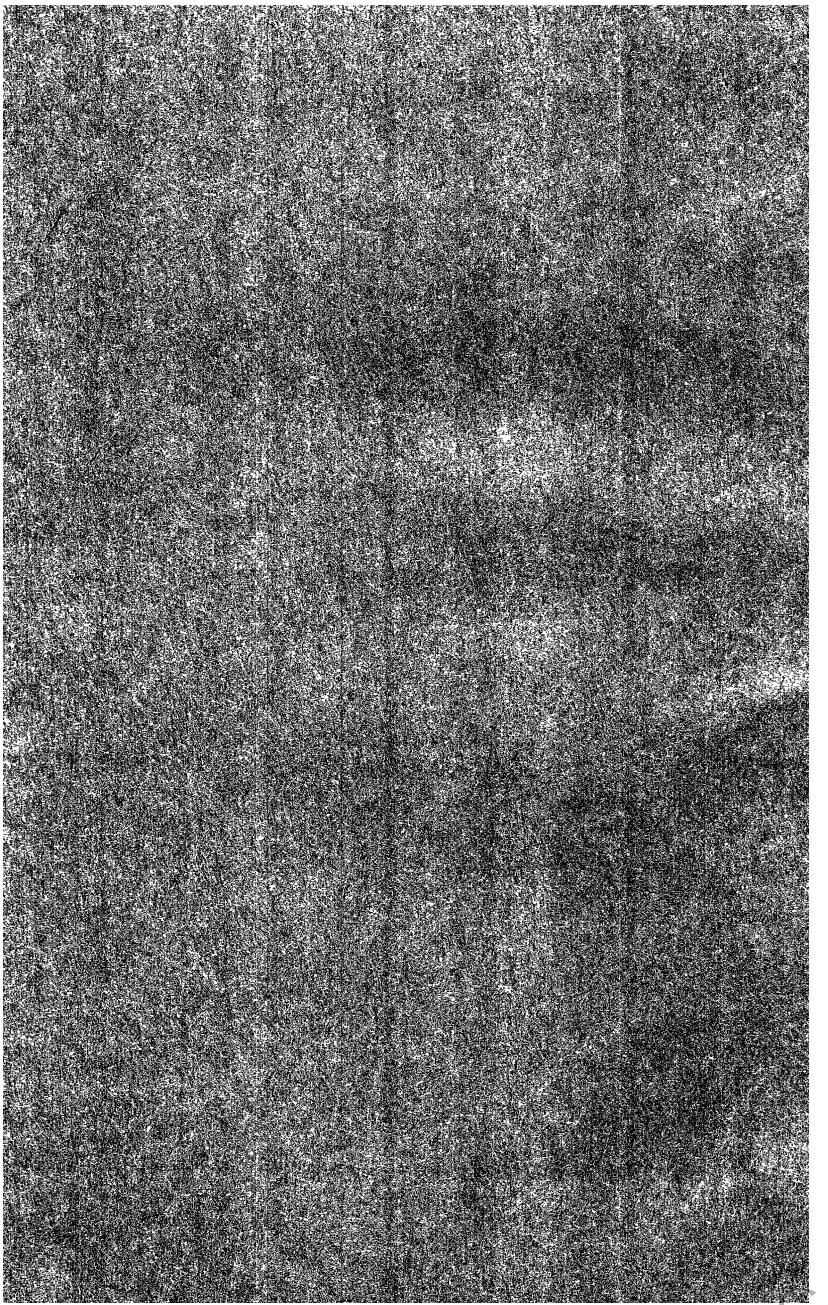

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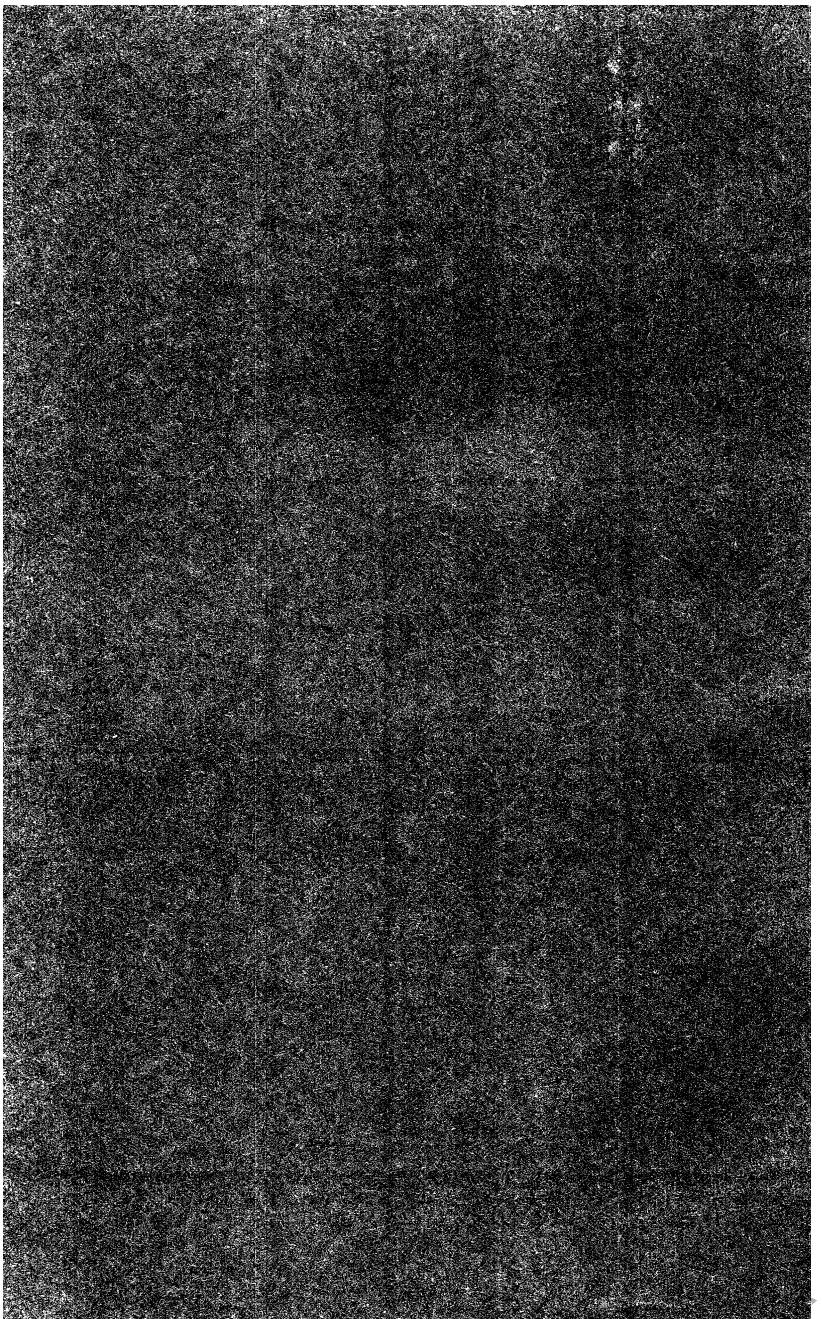
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Mrs. Montagu
neè Elizabeth Robinson
from a miniature in the possession of Miss Montagu

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MRS MONTAGU

1720-1800

AN ESSAY

PROPOSED AS A THESIS TO THE FACULTY OF LETTERS
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS

BY R. HUCHON

LECTURER IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AT THE FACULTY OF LETTERS
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NANCY

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PREFACE

It is well known that, between 1750 and 1790, a group of remarkable women emulated in London the example given them in Paris by Mmes du Tencin, du Deffand, and Geoffrin, and instituted assemblies, whence card-playing was excluded for the sake of literary conversation. Among these ladies, familiarly nicknamed "Blue Stockings," the leading spirit undoubtedly was Mrs Montagu, the subject of this Essay.

It could not be maintained without great exaggeration that, since her day, her fame has lost none of its brightness. Her conversational powers, like the acting of a player, have vanished into air, hardly leaving any trace behind. Her merits as a critic and a

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champion of Shakespeare against Voltaire are sometimes disputed, and, at best, acknowledged in a footnote.

Yet, she has never been totally forgotten. Her early *Letters*, first published in 1809, have been partly reprinted, with much additional matter, in Mrs Climenson's recent work on *The Early Life of Elizabeth Montagu*. Dr Doran's study, published in 1873 under the title of *A Lady of the Last Century*, though superficial and desultory, was the first attempt at a sketch of the whole subject. And as long as Voltaire finds readers, Mrs Montagu's name will remain inseparable from his last production, the second *Letter to the Academy* prefixed to the tragedy of *Irène*.

This little book is not intended as a Biography, which Mrs Climenson alone can satisfactorily write, with the help of the mass of unprinted correspondence in her possession. Our scope is narrower. From the tangled biographical details contained in the printed

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volumes, we have tried to discover and collect, as best we could, the half-obscured and scattered lineaments of Mrs Montagu's intellectual and moral character. We have devoted more attention than any previous writer to her *Essay on the Genius of Shakespeare*, examined it in the light of the criticism of the time, and accompanied its author in her journey to France during the eventful summer of 1776. In the third and concluding chapter, her social influence and intercourse with the men and women of letters, her contemporaries, have been considered. We cannot conclude without expressing our great indebtedness to Mrs Climenson and to Mr Broadley for some unprinted material, which proved most valuable in the compiling and writing of this Essay.

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MRS MONTAGU AND HER FRIENDS

CHAPTER I

CHARACTERISTICS

I

SOME time in June 1779, Dr Johnson, discoursing with Mrs Thrale "on the amazing progress made of late years in literature by the women," remarked that "he was himself astonished at it," that "he well remembered when a woman who could spell a common letter was regarded as all accomplished; but now," added he, "they vie with the men in everything."[1] Nowhere was their success to be so conspicuous as in novel-writing. For more than a generation, from the publication of *Evelina* to that of *Waverley*, they held an almost undisputed sway over this their

[1] *The Diary and Letters of* Madame d'ARBLAY, ed. 1876, i., 160.

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chosen literary domain. Both in realistic and in romantic fiction, the "age was distinguished by producing extraordinary women."[1] The temper of the times, the tone of a society that was yearly gaining in respectability and intellectual refinement, accorded with the delicacy they wished to observe in their delineation of manners and in their style. They no longer ran any risk of endangering or even forfeiting their fair fame by becoming authoresses. Of them it could not be said, in Mrs Montagu's words, that "the generality of women who have excelled in wit have failed in chastity."[2] More fortunate than Mrs Aphra Behn or Mrs Manley, they could please the public without being scorned for their pains; they could live respected, marry decently, nay, be preferred to some employment at Court. Thus, the world of fashion and the world of letters drew closer, and women played their part in both. Some, like Mrs Vesey, Mrs Thrale, Mrs Boscawen, Miss Monckton, Mrs Walsingham, delighted in filling their London drawing-rooms with as

[1] *The Diary and Letters of* Madame d'ARBLAY, ed. 1876, i., 160. Burke to F. Burney.

[2] *The Letters of* Mrs ELIZABETH MONTAGU, ed. 1813, iii., 97.

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many literary celebrities as they could collect; more distinguished even than these, Mrs Montagu, uniting the qualifications of a woman of fashion and of a writer, helped to raise the social standing of women of letters, and thereby acquired for herself pre-eminence in her own time and some right to the remembrance of posterity.

Born on 2nd October 1720, she was the fourth child and eldest daughter of Matthew Robinson and of Elizabeth Drake, both wealthy members of the landed gentry, and possessed, or soon to be possessed, of no less than four estates in Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire, and in Kent. Her father seems to have been a man of some talent and great indolence. His skill as a landscape painter excelled, we are told, that "of most of the professed artists of his day"; his conversational powers and "intellectual endowments"[1] would have made him a favourite in the social and convivial circles of the metropolis. But, ever fond of his ease and pleasure, he had married too soon, when a youth of eighteen and a mere undergraduate

[1] *The Letters of* Mrs ELIZABETH MONTAGU, ed. 1809, i., 94.

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or "fellow-commoner" at Cambridge. Without any profession from which he could draw an income to supplement his personal means, he was driven by the care of his growing family into the dull retirement of a country life. He thought it "perfect misery."[1] In vain did he practise "shooting and coursing" as a diversion against the dreaded "hyp," the melancholy that threatened him: such poor palliatives proved ineffectual, and his "physician," his daughter playfully wrote, could not "prescribe him any cordial strong enough to keep up his spirits."[2] This languid existence lasted many years, first at Coveney, near Cambridge, and, worse still, from 1733 till 1746, at Monks Horton near Hythe, then a solitary part of Kent. The house he inhabited with his twelve children was indeed pleasant enough: a contemporary print represents it as a "large square" building "surmounted by a cupola" and surrounded with walled gardens.[3] On a Sunday morning after

[1] *The Early Life of Elizabeth Montagu*, by Mrs CLIMENSON, 1906, ii., 94.
[2] *Letters*, ed. 1809, i., 10.
[3] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 14.

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church, "Mr Robinson" could ride with his daughter as far as a neighbouring "high hill," whence a vast expanse of sea was to be seen, and also "a little of France," just enough "to distinguish the corn fields near Boulogne from the pasture."[1] Such peaceful joys did not, however, satisfy the soul of Mr Robinson, turned squire against his will. He longed to become again a fine gentleman about town, as in his youth. When his wife died, in 1746, he was only too glad to settle in London and to mingle again in "the high and polished society of the clubs." Henceforward, his happiness was as complete as a man's can be: "Life," Mrs Montagu writes, "has been to him one long play day. He has never tasted business, care, or study; *vivre au jour la journée*, as the French saying is, has been his moral maxim."[2] His was an easy-going, epicurean temper, occasionally depressed by idle fits of languor.

We may believe that this country-hater could not forbear smiling at the peculiarities of his neighbours. His remarks found a

[1] *Letters*, i., 240-1.
[2] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 156.

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ready echo in his bright little daughter Elizabeth. From a very tender age, she possessed a nimble tongue and a caustic pen. The first years of her life had been spent, not only under the venerable shadow of York Minster,[1] and in the solitude of Coveney, but also in the learned society that met, in Cambridge, at the house of the University Librarian, the celebrated Dr Conyers Middleton, her grandmother's second husband. She had become a favourite with him and his friends, "an object of great notice and admiration" for her "uncommon sensibility, acuteness of understanding and extraordinary beauty as a child." With her grey-

[1] By which she had been deeply impressed. On 16th September 1759, she wrote to Lord Lyttelton: — "I expect your lordship will be much pleased with the cathedral; I have not seen any building of that kind so noble. . . . I shall be glad to hear that your lordship and Mr Lyttelton like York, to which perhaps I am partial as to the place of my nativity. One of the strongest pictures in my mind is the funeral of a dean of York, which I saw perform'd with great solemnity in the cathedral when I was about four years old" (*Letters*, ed. 1813, iv., 238-9). Hence her admiration of this particular edifice, and of Gothic architecture in general, though she preferred the elegant style of "Athenian buildings." "Both are perfect in their kind," as she said, with true critical taste (*ibid.*, 249-50).

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blue[1] eyes, her high-arched, dark eyebrows, her "brilliant complexion"[2] contrasting with her brown hair, her middle stature and stooping posture, she looked so intelligent and so demure that much attention was already paid to her. The Doctor, desirous of improving her memory, required of her "an account of the learned conversations at which she was frequently present," and no doubt Elizabeth proved an apt scholar. Even in solitary Monks Horton, her three elder brothers formed an audience whose sympathy or disapproval could not but invite her to exertion. Warm disputes, we are told, took place now and then, in which the mother acted as a moderator. Mr Robinson, delighted with his daughter's lively sallies, "afforded them perhaps too much encouragement" at the expense of his acquaintance. And as she spoke, so did she write. Her letters, from her thirteenth to her twentieth year, and even later, are remarkable for a

[1] Cf. *Letters*, ed. 1813, iv., 122, where she speaks "of my two little grey eyes." Cf. also *ibid.*, ed. 1809, ii., 317.

[2] In 1773 alas! it had faded into a "pale yellow," *Historical MSS. Commission, MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 338.

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sort of playful girlish irony that often pleases by its exuberance, and sometimes jars on us by its flippancy.

The insignificant labourer alone excepted, all sorts and conditions of countrymen and women run the gauntlet of her satiric touches. She laughs at them collectively and individually. "Were things as in Æsop's days," she airily writes, "when beasts could talk, the country might be a place of conversation: a jay might flutter about like a beau, a calf talk like a squire's eldest son, a stately ox be as grave a companion as the chairman of the bench of justices, a bull roar like a patriot senator. . . . But if these metamorphoses cannot be compassed, it is very common to see the reverse of my scheme; though I never saw a calf a direct young squire, I have seen many an heir-apparent a very calf, and so of the rest. . . . Here nobody laughs at what they say but themselves."[1] Evidently this young lady is not deficient in assurance—impertinence perhaps,—but she observes and listens before she criticises. One evening, with the indispensable help of the full moon,[2] she has

[1] *Letters*, i., 48-9.

[2] The only time for visiting in the country. Cf.

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gone eight miles from home to a ball given by Lady Thanet, a great personage in that part of Kent. When she returns, we hear a description of the whole family; "I think I never saw so formidable a countenance" as her ladyship's, says she; "her smiles are like the sunshine and rain on an April day; she smiles and frowns together, which makes a beautiful contrast in her visage." The child has his turn, after the mother: "Lord Thanet's education of his son is something particular; he encourages him in swearing, and singing nasty ballads with the servants; he is a very fine boy, but prodigiously rude; he came down to breakfast the other day when there was company, and his maid came with him, who, instead of carrying a little whirligig for his lordship to play with, was lugging in a huge billet for his plaything."[1] Our youthful satirist seldom sees deep into characters; she fastens rather on the outward shows of things, on oddities of dress and manners. A certain "worshipful justice"

GIBBON'S *Autobiography* (at Buriton, about 1760): "I dreaded the period of the full moon, which was usually reserved for our more distant excursions."

[1] *Letters*, i., 33-4.

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tried to entertain her one day with "the most elegant encomiums upon the country and the most barbarous censures upon the town." She paid less attention to her visitor's talk than to his dress, which consisted of "a new leathern belt, scarlet waistcoat and plush breeches."[1] The Rev. "Mr Spintext," her vicar, partakes of the general dulness round about Horton. She probably thinks she could improve his sermons. He has been "somewhat tedious to-day," she remarks on the 14th of July 1741: "poor man, he is a good while explaining anything, and one must wait till he has overtaken his meaning; if he finds it at last, it is well, if not, he calls for it again the next Sunday."[2] Should he be a bachelor and propose to her, she will not have him, nor, for that matter, any of those clodhoppers whose wits stick in the mud, as their shoes in their clay. She may condescend to play her tricks on them, to send, for instance, to one "Mr James Brockman of Beachborough"[3] an anonymous letter complaining of his absence from "balls, hops, and

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON'S *Early Life of Mrs Montagu*, i., 31.

[2] *Letters*, i., 251-2. [3] *Ibid.*, 16-17; ii. 58-9.

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assemblies"; but, if the same James Brockman loses his heart to her, she will have "no balsam for him," she will bury rather than marry him. He has, however, "such a stock of flesh to waste upon" that he will survive some time yet.

Wherever this disdainful beauty goes, a light-hearted sportive smile brightens her countenance. Like her father, she knows no cares, or soon dispels them. Her younger sister Sarah being ill of the smallpox, Elizabeth has been sent away from home to a yeoman's[1] farm in the neighbouring village of Hayton. At this Mr Smith's her surroundings are duller than ever, but she laughs all the more. "Amongst the old

[1] This individual and his family were excellent representatives of their class (in 1741): "They are not very fine people; they have a small estate, and help it out with a little farming; are very busy and careful. . . . They have been possessed in the family, for ought I know, since the Conqueror, of about four hundred pounds a year; they have a good old house, neatly furnished; but there is nothing of modern structure to be seen in it" (*Letters*, i., 141, 153, 162). As the century advanced, this agricultural middle-class, half landowners, half farmers, gradually disappeared in most places, Kent excepted. Mr Smith's avarice is not less typical than his way of living; peasants, as we know, are proverbially "near."

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furniture" of the house, she does not "forget the clock, who has indeed been a time-server. . . . Even me it governs, sends me to bed at ten, and makes me rise, oh barbarous! at eight. I go to bed awake, and arise asleep." But, in the course of the day, she rouses herself well enough to dash off this picturesque sketch of her host, an old miser: "He eats in fear of waste and riot, sleeps with the dread of thieves, denies himself everything for fear of wanting anything; . . . he has the curse of covetousness to want the property of his neighbours, while he dare not touch his own; the sum of his wisdom and his gains will be by living poor to die rich. . . . The other day, meeting him in a grove, for want of something better to say, I took notice we were under the shade of fine trees; he said, yes, indeed, they were brave timber and would sell well. I said they would afford a comfortable habitation to a colony of rooks. To which, in the same vein, he answered he loved the creatures well enough, but that they would eat the corn. . . . I verily believe he would annihilate half God's works to have his granary the fuller." The very pen she writes with, being the miser's,

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may not pass banter-free. "I believe, since it was dipped in ink, it never made a compliment. It has been worn out in the service of gain." Frolicsome as a kitten, she plays with all that offers. She attends once a year the "Canterbury races," with their concomitant balls and assemblies, where the county gentry meet; as she suffers from headaches, she repairs to Tunbridge, or even to Bath, and drinks the waters. But let no formal face appear, or it will set her pen a-going. "The person most noticed for singularity at Tunbridge," says she, "was Lord Stanhope: he is always making mathematical scratches in his pocket-book, so that one-half of the people took him for a conjurer, the other half for a fool. He is much admired and commended by his acquaintance, which are few in number. I think he had three at the Wells, and I believe he did not allow them above a sentence a-piece in a whole day."[1] Even a mathematician may not look grave; even invalids at Bath may not be wrapped up in flannel; they are so queer. And all uncommon characters or sights provoke her mirth and satire: "The morning

[1] *Letters*, i., 25. Cf. Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 18.

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after I arrived I went to the Ladies' Coffee House, where I heard of nothing but the rheumatism in the shoulder, the sciatica in the hip, and the gout in the toe. . . . I began to fancy myself in the hospitals or infirmaries; I never saw such an assembly of disorders."[1] Nor was this sprightly, ironical mood the effect of mere youthful thoughtlessness: when years had passed and had brought to her some trials and much experience, still she remained ever ready to laugh at the foibles of others.[2]

II

Of a high-strung, "nervous constitution," she enjoys her real or fancied superiority over her neighbours. Vanity, as she herself acknowledges, is her ruling passion. In a half-serious, half-humorous tone, she describes its invigorating power and charm. Through it, she has been pleased with the looking-glass, reconciled to the echo, and

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 39.

[2] Cf. *MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 334; letter from Bath, 9th December 1764.

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made fond of pen and ink; "take but this my indulgent friend and constant companion from me, I shall neither look, talk, nor write to my satisfaction. . . . Flattery, it suggests,[1] is truth, and censure is envy; kindness is the reward, malice the consequence, of my merit." "Content with herself," she never broods, but throws her whole soul into the diversions of her little world. A perpetual flow of good spirits carries her along. "Contemplation is not made for a woman on the right side of thirty," she declares; "rest and an elbow-chair are the comforts of age; the pleasures of youth are of a more lively sort."[2] Let but a blind fiddler strike up a tune, and up she springs, ready for the dance; the longer it lasts, the better; she will return "at two o'clock in the morning, mightily pleased to have been so well entertained." Should the coach break down on the way back, as it frequently happened in those days, when flooded ruts had to serve for cross-country roads, she will "squall for joy," and, to complete her felicity, she will stand "half an hour in the most refreshing

[1] The original text is in the past tense. *Letters*, ii., 22.
[2] *Ibid.*, i., 27.

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rain, and the coolest north breeze" she ever felt. The next morning, she comes "croaking down to breakfast," but, far from complaining, she denies having caught a cold, as "one always" does "when one has been scheming." Seventeen years afterwards, when she was already thirty-five, her friend Gilbert West could still comment upon the "store of wild-fire"[1] that she possessed. To this fund of nervous energy was due, no doubt, her untiring lifelong activity, in spite of weak health.

As another consequence of this, a "lively imagination"[2] distinguished her, especially in youth. She dwelt "in the medium between judgment and fancy." Able to reason and observe, she could also see visions and dream dreams. "It was from this picture-drawing faculty," she wrote in August 1760,[3] "I used to be always amused and gay. . . . If any person had then advertised for a companion to travel through the deserts of Siberia or Africa, I would have

[1] *Letters*, iii., 297 (1st July 1755.)

[2] The phrase is Mrs Donnellan's in 1740. *Letters*, i., 112.

[3] *Letters*, iv., 273-4.

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recommended my imagination to them, as one which would show cities where even a cottage did not appear. . . . When first fancy began to lose some of its creative powers, it retained the complaisance of Hamlet's courtier, and could trace a weasel or an elephant in a shapeless cloud, from the least hint that was given it." Such hints were borrowed from her reading or experience and developed in her letters for the amusement of her friends. If she wants delicately to urge the Duchess of Portland to more diligence in corresponding, she dates her message from "Pluto's palace," and announces that her death took place "last Thursday" for disappointment at not hearing from a certain duchess, that she has since crossed the Styx, encountered the shades and their king, consulted with the "melancholy lovers" her negligent friend had already sent there, and finally resolved to call "for the pen and ink Mrs Rowe had used to write her letters[1] from the dead to the living." There is much wit in this little invention, by which her reproof is mythologically conveyed and tempered. Or perhaps one of her own

[1] See *Friendship in Death*, twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living (1728).

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letters to the Duchess has miscarried, and its loss must be explained. A servant had been ordered to post it at Canterbury. No doubt, "the fellow" forgot his errand. This "hint" suffices: here, as in many other occasions, her fancy takes wing; images and words throng on her paper. The unfortunate letter becomes a creature living and sensible: what must be "its mortification that, instead of having the honour to kiss Your Grace's hands, it must be confined in the footman's pocket, with greasy gloves, rotten apples, mouldy nuts, a pack of dirty cards, and, the only companion of its sort, a tender epistle from his sweetheart 'tru tell Deth.' Perhaps by its situation subject to be kicked by his master every morning, till at last, by ill-usage and rude company, worn too thin for any other use, it may make its exit in lighting a tobacco pipe."[1] A gifted damsel indeed, who could write thus at fourteen, with so much verve and point.

To pass from her sluggish, humdrum surroundings at Horton to the elegant, high-bred society of her noble friend, the

[1] *Letters*, i., 12, and Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 12-3.

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Duchess of Portland, was a delightful change. Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley, grand-daughter of the celebrated Lord Treasurer Oxford, had been "in early childhood the object of Swift's poetic attention, and the subject of Prior's expiring Muse."[1] Born in February 1714, she was Elizabeth's senior by six years, and had married in 1734 William Bentinck, second Duke of Portland. When still living at the paternal estate of Wimpole in Cambridgeshire, she had made the acquaintance of Miss Robinson, then about eleven years of age. The visits to Wimpole had been followed by invitations to the Duchess's London residence at Whitehall, and to her country-seat at Bulstrode "near Gerrard's Cross" in Buckinghamshire. There Elizabeth, sympathetically nicknamed "Fidget," found herself in a brilliant, cheerful, congenial circle. That "melancholy monument of Dutch magnificence,"[2] the house at Bulstrode, and its park possessed unnumbered charms in her eyes: "The rural beauties of

[1] WRAXALL'S *Historical Memoirs*, ed. 1904, p. 95.

[2] HOR. WALPOLE'S *Letters*, ed. P. Toynbee, 1903, iii., 317.

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the place," she writes in 1740, "would persuade me I was in the plains of Arcadia, but . . . the building, under whose gilded roof I dwell, has a pomp far beyond pastoral." Great simplicity, however, prevailed in the life of the Duchess, deeply attached to her family: "We breakfast at nine," Elizabeth goes on, "dine at two, drink tea at eight and sup at ten. In the morning, we work or read. In the afternoon the same, walk from six till tea-time, and then write till supper."[1] But the "little jewels," "Lady Elizabeth, Lady Harriot and the Marquis," would often come in and insist on playing for "half an hour" with their mother and her friends; then the Duchess would say, "Don't go, Penny,"[2] or "Fidget," as the case might be, "till I have net one row in my cherry net," for this noble lady, like the future Mrs Delany, excelled at her needle and wheel. She was an enthusiastic collector of natural curiosities, of "ores and minerals,"[3] of fossils,

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 49.

[2] *I.e.*, Mrs Pendarves, then a widow, later Mrs Delany. Cf. *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, 1st series, 1861, ii., 21-2.

[3] *Ibid.*, 2nd series, 1862, ii., 19.

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which "the ingenious philosopher, Mr Lightfoot," gathered for her in the mines of Cornwall, of plants and animals, which she fostered with a love as tender as that of Lady Hervey for her birds and roses.[1] "The beauty of Bulstrode in spite of the weather is not to be described," Mrs Delany remarked in 1776, "no more than Her Grace's transport at seeing one of the hares suckle its three young ones in the court before the drawing-room window! Another piece of extraordinary good fortune also attended the Duchess this morning; four old nightingales with four young ones were brought to-day in a cage, which she set at liberty with her own fair hands."[2] In 1740, we hear of "macaws, parrots and all sorts of foreign birds flying in one of the woods"; in 1753, there is mentioned "the most extraordinary bull ever seen," not so high as a large dog, "as round as a ball, as tame as a lamb," with "a hump between his shoulders, in camel fashion, much higher than its head," which East Indian curiosity

[1] *Letters of Mary Lepel, Lady Hervey*. London: Murray, 1821, pp. 106 and 157 (at Ickworth, Suffolk).

[2] *The Autobiography*, etc., 2nd series, ii., 224.

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was, by the Duchess's kind attention, soon provided with "a fair lady."[1] So much for the Bulstrode "menagerie," renowned in its time. The garden, doubtless, deserved equal praise, such as Dr Young, ever assiduous to please, bestowed on it in sentences most exclamative: "I beg leave to step into your flower-garden of which you are so fond. Why, truly, it is a most gorgeous apartment of your paradise. What shapes! what colours! what combinations of them! what varieties! what inimitable patterns for human art to copy after! Even a Duchess's fingers are far distanced by them.[2] Poor Solomon! what a beggarly appearance dost thou make in all thy glory, compared with these!"[3] Nor was the flattered possessor of such natural beauties indifferent to those of literature and of the arts. There existed at Bulstrode a "brave gallery of old pictures" noticed by Horace Walpole; the Duchess read all fashionable books, "laughed at fiction," and, notwithstanding Young's

[1] *The Autobiography*, 1st series, 1861, ii., 241-2 and 293.

[2] Did they suggest to Mrs Delany the idea of her "Paper Flora"?

[3] *Historical MSS. Commission, MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 318 (4th November 1750).

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recommendation,[1] formed a poor opinion of *Pamela* and even of *Clarissa*. The society of a woman, so warm in her affections, so many-sided in her pursuits, must have been singularly delightful to her "Fidget" and to the cherished friends with whom she loved to surround herself: Mrs Pendarves, "faultless in manners," "elegant in deport-

[1] Who thus announced to her in September 1748 the forthcoming last instalment of *Clarissa*: " . . . Mr Richardson left me but on Saturday last. . . . I know Your Grace has no great esteem of this author; therefore in a letter to you I shall suppress my admiration of him, and will only, instead of panegyrist, turn prophet, and let Your Grace know that your great-grandchildren will read, and not without tears, the sheets which are now in the Press." (On the Duchess's unfavourable opinion of Richardson's novels, cf. also *The Diary of* Madame d'ARBLAY, ed. 1876, i., 520.) Some months later, on 29th January 1748 (O.S.), Young returned to the same subject: "Has Your Grace read his *Clarissa*? What a beautiful brat of the brain is there! I wish Your Grace would stand godmother, and give it its name, *Clarissa the Divine*. That romance will probably do more good than a body of Divinity. . . . And yet, Madam, this excellent offspring of the imagination was in danger of having been stifled in its birth; or, at least, of having been made a changeling. I think Your Grace knows Mr Littleton; he, Mr Fielding, Cibber, etc., all of them pressed the author very importunately to make his story end happily; but does not Your Grace think it is infinitely better as it is. . . ." (*MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 313).

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ment," "the pattern of a fine lady of other days,"[1] Mrs Donnellan also, whose voice sounded as sweet as Philomel's.[2] Can we now wonder, that Elizabeth preferred Bulstrode to Horton?

The notice taken of her there gratified the dearest wish of her heart, her desire, we do not say to excel, but to shine. "Of what worth is remembrance without praise?" she once wrote,[3] thus giving a most luminous self-revelation of her character and aims through life. She formed one of those exceptions, which Dr Young, in his *Satires*, paradoxically made the rule; the "love of fame" was indeed her "universal passion." And her eager appetite was fed, never satiated, by the early admiration of her parents and friends. When informed of the servant's negligence at Canterbury,[4] the Duchess of Portland answered her correspondent, then about fourteen, as follows: "I assure you I

[1] Burke on her, in the *Diary of* Madame d'ARBLAY, ed. 1876, iii., 421.

[2] On her singing in a "cover'd boat" on the Thames, cf. *The Autobiography of Mrs Delany*, 1st series, 1861, i., 276.

[3] *Letters*, ii., 17.

[4] Cf. above, p. 18.

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am very angry at the fellow's not taking care of your letter, for they always give me infinite pleasure, and I esteem it as a great loss."[1] The Duke himself flattered her in a strain that might seem, but is not, ironical: "Your being got rid of your feaver," he tells her in 1741, "gave us great joy, for we began to be uneasy about Fidgett; nobody can see her without admiration, and when one hears her open her lips, one is struck dumb."[2] Even the great Dr Middleton, who had taught her the art of conversation, complimented her on her "amiable qualities," her "singular merit and accomplishments."[3] Needless to add that she reigned like a young queen over the family circle. Her eldest brother, Matthew Robinson, a fierce misanthrope and eater of raw meat in later days, astonishes us by the gallant encomiums he lavishes on her: "I should be ashamed after so long a friendship with you," he writes from Bath in 1741, "to be ignorant of any of your talents, yet I do assure you there are some of them that after so long an acquaintance with them I have not yet done admiring."

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 13. [2] *Ibid.*, 77.
[3] On her marriage. Cf. *Letters*, ii., 175.

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For in her retirement at Hayton Farm,[1] she has shown to the delighted Matthew that she can find as much pleasure "in study and in the contemplation of the ways of men or works of Nature" as in the "cheerful round of mirth," for which her "parts and spirits" were "purposely contrived." "Bating the tribe of your lovers," concludes this enthusiast, "you cannot have a more hearty friend to your person, or more assured admirer of your merit and accomplishments."[2] Elizabeth, we have seen, was disposed to listen to the advice of vanity, her strengthener, and to reject the counsel of humility, her foe. She could not, therefore, disbelieve the pleasant testimonies of so many affectionate witnesses. She must be a superior woman, since all her acquaintances declared her to be so. She felt quite ready to undertake the part that seemed reserved for her. She would become some day a power in Society. Observe with what proud satisfaction she informs her parents, in 1737, that the Duchess will this year introduce her "to the best company in the town," that, when her friend "lies in," "she

[1] Cf. above, p. 11.

[2] Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 78 (27th April 1741).

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will receive in form" all visitors; how anxious she is to have a "handsome suit," as "upon this occasion of first appearing with my Lady Duchess," she must be "in full dress."[1] How delighted she is also, when at Canterbury in 1739, messages and visits pour in upon her "from prebends, deacons, and the rest of the church militant here on earth!"[2] This homage, already paid to her youth in a little county town, she will afterwards court and taste in the more exalted circles of the metropolis, when, brilliant with jewels, she will receive ambassadors and princesses in her "Palais Portman." Vanity, ambition, the desire of making her real or assumed superiority felt; such is the distinctive feature of her character. Young, who had seen much of her at Bulstrode, at Tunbridge, at Welwyn even, knew it well: "She has often held me by the ear," he writes of her in 1745, "till all about her were annihilated, and, in a numerous assembly, there was neither company nor person but herself. . . . She has an excellent and uncommon capacity, which ambition a little precipitates, and

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 23.
[2] *Letters*, i., 62.

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prejudice sometimes misleads, but time and experience may make her a finished character, for I think her heart is sound."[1] Time and experience, far from subduing, could only increase her love of social influence and splendour.

This ostentatiousness betrays itself too often in her correspondence, and takes much from its charm. She knew that her letters were circulated, that if, for instance, she penned a fine condemnatory paragraph on "Lord Bolingbroke's pompous, rhetorical and inconsistent Declamations," it would be communicated by Gilbert West to Dr Herring, Archbishop of Canterbury. In return, she was highly pleased to hear that His Grace had desired to have "a copy," "promising that if he showed it to anybody, he would cautiously conceal the name of the author."[2] Her "favourite friends, Lord Bath and Lord Lyttelton" repeatedly urged her to allow the "future publication"[3] of these compositions, so that she must very soon have had an eye to

[1] To the Duchess of Portland, from Tunbridge Wells (*MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 289).

[2] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 63 (1754). Cf. *Letters*, iii., 283-4.

[3] *Letters*, ii., 313.

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her readers to come. Her tone and style, when not ironical, do not strike us as being the pure, genuine language of the heart. Even in her familiar letters, she too plainly writes for effect, and the result, in spite of their admiration, must have sadly tired the patience of her contemporaries, as it does that of the present age. With unerring skill, she seizes on commonplaces, whose modicum of thought she washes almost colourless in a stream of words that, once let loose, overflows her pages. Such critics as dislike excessive conciseness, and recommend abundance, exuberance of manner, may drink at her spring; she will give them their fill. Her fluency no woman can exceed. The Duchess of Portland's fondness for birds and poultry occurring to her, she knows her cue and expatiates on this theme. Of all fowl, she loves a goose best; "surely a goose is a goodly bird; if its hiss be insignificant, remember that from its side the engine is taken with which the laws are registered, and history recorded; though not a bird famous for courage, from this same ample wing are the heroes' exploits engraven on the pillar of everlasting fame; though not an animal of

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sagacity, yet does it lend its assistance to the precepts of philosophy; if not beautiful, yet with its tender touch in the hands of some inspired lover is Lesbia's blush, Sacharissa's majesty, and Chloe's bloom made lasting, so that its brood, a 'university of goslins,' are the 'true worthies' of the age: impartial historians, unprejudiced philosophers, the great promoters of learning,"[1] and, though so long, the enumeration remains incomplete. She has a gift for pompous declamation. Hers is the Asiatic kind among epistolary styles. She aims at eloquence, in and out of season. In the depth of winter, when all Nature seems dead, she has retired to her closet, reads Sully's *Memoirs*, and comments upon them for the benefit of one of her friends: "I am leading you," she begins, "to the laurelled tombs of deceased heroes."[2] As if she were Young's faithful disciple, affectation is natural to her. She exercises her rhetoric even about the weather: "The spring has been unusually tardy," says she in June 1778, "and it is only within these few days that we have even partaken of her

[1] *Letters*, iii., 14-5.
[2] *Ibid.*, 136.

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agreeable caprices of alternate sunshine and showers. April, who used to be an agreeable coquette, often gay and pleasing, but inconstant, was this year a sullen, cold, severe prude. May, instead of being a blooming beauty, was an ugly dirty dowdy. June has hardly attained his fresh vigour, and will have the puny air of a minor on Midsummer Day, when summer used to be reckoned to come of age. The mornings have been so cold that the lark has been afraid to rise early, and the evenings so chill that the nightingale durst hardly sing to her friends and silence and night for fear of catching a hoarseness."[1] In her search after ornaments, such as comparisons and antitheses, she would have invented Euphuism, had it been yet undiscovered. She runs Falstaff hard in her elegant imitations of Lyly. Money, she thinks, is indispensable in marriage: "What is a woman without gold or fee simple?" says she; "a toy while she is young, and a trifle when she is old. Jewels of the first water are good for nothing till they are set, but as for us, who are no brilliants, we are nobody's

[1] To the Duchess of Portland (from Sandleford), 11th June 1778 (*MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 343-4).

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money till we have a foil, and are encompassed with the precious metal."[1] The richer we are, the more safely we pass through life. "The lofty cedar is only shook by the storms of heaven; the ivy is trod by every passenger."[2] Close by this "ivy" grows the famous "camomile."

Now and then, she becomes aware of her prolixity, and acknowledges that she "can spin a thread so long it seems neither to have end nor beginning, which serves to give her gentle correspondents an idea of eternity."[3] But, though she confesses her own fault, she will not or cannot correct it. In those leisurely days, perhaps, politeness and amiability in epistolary intercourse were measured by the number and denseness of the sheets; as the cost of postage was high, unless a frank could be obtained, as the expense was not the sender's, but the recipient's, the latter might think himself defrauded if he did not receive full weight for his money. So, Elizabeth wrote on, in order to please, and she did please. If news ran short, she could launch into moralisings

[1] *Letters*, i., 88.
[2] *Ibid.*, ii., 9.
[3] *Ibid.*, 137.

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on all kinds of subjects. On 1st January 1742, she sends her New Year's greetings to her "dear Donnellan"; what a fit opportunity this affords for descanting on the use and abuse of time! "In our youth," remarks this grave young lady, "we defer being prudent till we are old, and look forward to a promise of wisdom as the portion of latter years; when we are old, we seek not to improve, and scarce employ ourselves."[1] What does she know about it at twenty-one, we may ask? But the age was addicted to superficial philosophising, and she obeys the impulse of her time. She had read or heard about the Deistic controversy; she had gathered that thinkers of this school, vaguely pantheistic in their tendencies, found God in Nature, and, on one fine summer night, she follows the same train of thought: "For some time after sunset, the hemisphere glowed with purple light, then faded to a silver grey. . . . When the night began 'to hang out her golden lamps,' with great attention I watched the rising of every star till the whole heaven glowed with living sapphires, then I chose to consider them no

[1] *Letters*, ii., 89-90.

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longer separately as glowing gems, but lost myself in worlds beyond worlds, and system beyond system; till my mind rose to the great Maker of them all, who has not only given the stupendous laws by which all these vast bodies move, but with the same precision has appointed the modes and term of existence of the smallest animal that inhabits them."[1] Most characteristic of a period that considered "man" as the "proper study of mankind" is the passage from the contemplation of a natural scene to the moral teaching it conveys or to the analogies it suggests with life and experience. During an excursion in Yorkshire, Mrs Montagu reaches the rocky banks of the Wharf and describes the river in a few words: "The stream is as clear as the finest crystal, and, where it runs on the pebbles, dimples and whispers, but when it meets with rocks, it foams and roars and dashes and froths with wonderful impetuosity." She has been, as it were, surprised by this picturesque landscape. But she does not long remain absorbed in it. Even as she stands by the brink of the torrent, its reality seems to fade, and her thoughts return

[1] *Letters*, iv., 265-6.

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to their accustomed course. Such, she goes on, the human mind appears, "which, in the smooth and even scene of life, is gentle in its looks and tones, but, meeting great impediments, frets, storms and threatens, and we ask ourselves whether it is of the same element."[1]

The unpleasant effect produced by such harangues about commonplaces is still increased by occasional parades of erudition. Even in youth, Miss Robinson grievously suffered from what she calls "the female frailty of displaying more learning than is necessary or graceful."[2] She wore blue stockings from childhood to old age. She too evidently remained Dr Middleton's favourite pupil. Let us admit at once that she was no mere pretender, that for an eighteenth century woman, her reading is of a most extensive range. Greek she was ignorant of, but she could understand Latin, though she sometimes denied it.[3] Her knowledge of living languages she willingly

[1] *Letters*, iv., 305-6.
[2] *Ibid.*, iii., 134.
[3] Cf. *Letters*, iv., 120 (to Dr Monsey); and *ibid.*, 346 (to Mrs Carter).

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confessed; she spoke bad "French,"[1] but read it fluently; she quoted Molière at fourteen;[2] Longinus was known to her in Boileau's translation, and Horace in Dacier's; Thucydides she had perused in French and Italian versions;[3] she even thought of learning Spanish, but does not seem to have accomplished her purpose. Above all, she carefully kept pace with the literary activity of the time. Books of criticism and of divinity she would discuss, when asked for her opinion on them.[4] Novels, as too light food, she perhaps disdained; but she was well acquainted with English poetry, and her frequent allusions to Shakespearian passages and phrases testify to her familiarity with the works of the great dramatist. These attainments, extraordinary in her days, entitle her to our esteem, and won for her the respect of most of her contemporaries. Unfortunately, the irresistible impulse of vanity makes her too ready to show them. There was at Hayton Farm a strange weathercock or "fane," the old-fashioned structure of which had diverted her; the mention of its anti-

[1] *Letters*, iii., 193.
[2] Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 16.
[3] *Letters*, iv., 346.
[4] *Ibid.*, ii., 122, *seq.*

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quity in a letter to the Duchess of Portland serves as a peg to hang a sketch of English history upon, from the invasion of the Danes to the landing of "our glorious William."[1] Thomas Lyttelton, the son of her friend, having left Eton for Oxford, she writes to him a letter of advice, at his father's request, and recommends the study of the Ancients, with more emphasis than conviction, perhaps: "As you have got a key to the sacred shades of Parnassus, do not lose your time in sauntering in the homely orchards or diminutive pleasure gardens of the latter times. If the ancient inhabitants of Parnassus were to look down from their immortal bowers on our labyrinths, whose greatest boast is a fanciful intricacy, our narrow paths, where genius cannot take his bounding step, and all the pert ornaments in our *parterres* of wit, they would call them the moderns' folly. . . . I should be sorry to see you quit Thucydides for Voltaire, Livy for Vertot, Xenophon for the bragging Memoirs of French Marshals, and universal Tully, and deep Tacitus, for speculative politicians, modern orators, and the dreamers in universities or convents."[2] Shall

[1] *Letters*, i., 143. [2] *Ibia.*, iv., 87-8.

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we be surprised after this, if unkind sceptics, irritated by so much ostentation in manner and in style, thought of her as did Mr Crisp, Fanny Burney's literary adviser: "I believe I have told you," he wrote in 1780, "of several letters the Duchess of Portland showed me of hers formerly (for I had no acquaintance with herself) so full of affectation, refinement, attempts to philosophise, talking metaphysics—in all which particulars she so bewildered and puzzled herself and her readers, and showed herself so superficial—nay, really ignorant on the subjects she paraded on—that, in my own private mind's pocket-book, I set her down for a vain, empty, conceited pretender and little else."[1] The sentence is severe, and, to some extent, hostile. But, for all that, it proves "Daddy" Crisp's sagacity as a critic. In what he condemns, he is right; he is wrong only in what he forgets. "Fidget" had qualities which even her vanity and ostentatiousness could not mar.

[1] *The Diary and Letters of* Madame d'ARBLAY, ed. 1876, i., 232-3.

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III

What made her a remarkable woman was, that to the mercurial vivacity of a nervous temper she united calmness of deliberation and strength of will. Though she relished the pleasures that gratified vanity gives, she never bought them too dear. Prudence was her constant rule of conduct.[1] She blamed Voltaire's Amenaide in *Tancred* for not following "Virtue as by law established," for despising forms and following "Sentiment, a dangerous guide."[2] Happiness and influence being her aims in life, she adapted means to end with the self-command of an accomplished gamester. She kept so strict a watch on her heart that passion never invaded it. Her judgment, unruffled, shaped her course through the world: "There is no end of the bad consequences of an improper marriage," she wrote at fifty-eight.[3] She had been most careful to avoid them. At eighteen, she described the ideal husband she could be

[1] Cf. *Letters*, i., 123, and Middleton's praise, *ibid.*, ii., 176.
[2] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 234.
[3] DORAN'S *A Lady of the Last Century*, 1873, p. 228.

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disposed to favour: "He should have a great deal of sense and prudence to direct me and instruct me, much wit to divert me, beauty to please me, good humour to indulge me in the right, and reprove me gently when I am in the wrong; money enough to afford me more than I can want, and as much as I can wish"[1]—all perfections in short; observe, however, that mutual fondness is not mentioned. Riches and wisdom conjoined, such are the essential requisites; to these she will yield her hand — and her heart into the bargain. "If I am to be bound to a vessel," she declared at twenty-one, "I wish it may be a first rate. . . . Gold is the chief ingredient in the composition of worldly happiness. Living in a cottage on love is certainly the worst diet and the worst habitation one can find out. . . . For my part, when I marry, I do not intend to enlist entirely under the banners of Cupid or Plutus, but take prudent consideration and decent inclination for my advisers."[2] We may be sure that this "inclination" will be "decent" indeed, and nowise extravagant.

[1] *Letters*, i., 38-9.
[2] *Ibid.*, 82-3.

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Was ever human creature better adapted to her environment, to the cold, logical, matter-of-fact age she flourished in? And is it strange that more ardent natures should have been chilled, almost repelled by her frigid self-possession? She is "an ignoramus in love," Mrs Chapone once jokingly said,[1] and Mrs Montagu herself confessed the truth of the saying.[2] "As we have often agreed," Miss Burney wrote to Mrs Thrale in 1781, "Mrs Montagu is a character rather to respect than love, for she has not that *don d'aimer* by which alone love can be made fond or faithful,"[3] that sweet, kindly longing after sympathy, irrepressible in Mrs Thrale—Mrs Montagu's opposite at all points.

An incident that happened in her old age curiously illustrates her unsentimental temper. About 1773, at the death of her friend Dr John Gregory, Professor of Physic in the University of Edinburgh, she had taken as a companion his daughter Dorothea, whom

[1] *The Works of* Mrs CHAPONE, ed. 1807, i., 180 (Mrs Chapone to Mrs Carter, November 1782).

[2] *Letters*, iv., 351, to Mrs Carter (1761): "... you and I, who have never been in love ..."

[3] *The Diary and Letters of* Madame d'ARBLAY, i., 326.

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Miss Burney has portrayed as a "frank, open, shrewd and sensible" nature, speaking "her opinion both of matters and things with a plumpness of honesty and readiness that both pleases and diverts."[1] This hearty sincere Scotchwoman must have found her duties somewhat strange and irksome in the splendid London residence of her protectress, for she seized the first opportunity that presented itself of regaining her liberty. Sometime in October 1782, she "went to Edinburgh to visit her brother, who was then newly married." She had "promised to return about the meeting of Parliament," but, instead of keeping her word, "she made various excuses," Mrs Montagu says, in a circumstantial account[2] from which we shall largely quote: "And on the 6th of January, she wrote me a long letter to tell me all her future happiness depended on my giving my consent to her marrying a Mr Alison, who had not a shilling fortune, nor any preferment but a curacy at Durham." The much beloved and much despised "Mr Alison" was no other than the future author

[1] *The Diary and Letters of* Madame d'ARBLAY, i., 240.
[2] *MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 353-5.

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of the *Essay on the Nature and the Principles of Taste*, and the father of the historian. Obviously, Miss Gregory's choice was justified by the event. But Mrs Montagu, actuated by prudential considerations, perhaps also by selfish motives, refused to comply with such a request. Her answer to the truant was peremptory: "I told her that, though I had always had for her the tenderness of a mother, yet I could not pretend to parental authority, therefore my consent to her marriage was not necessary, but my approbation or countenance to such a marriage I never could give, my respect for the memory of her father, my duty to my own nephews and nieces, and to the world in general, forbade my giving my countenance to imprudent hasty engagements, ever heart-wounding to parents and friends, and too often unfortunate to the young persons who made them." This severe, haughty reproof was a shock to Dorothea, who, on receiving it, "fell into fits as young ladies often do when they cannot obtain consent to an improper marriage." As her dear Mr Alison, however, had not yet obtained the small living of "£100 a year" judged indispensable to settle upon,

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she agreed to return till he had "such preferment." "I would behave to her," Mrs Montagu went on, "with my usual kindness, but she must never speak to me" on the subject. "This condition was kept on both sides, and I also insisted she should neither see Mr Alison nor correspond with him; all which she promised, and, I believe, faithfully observed. But one day this spring," in 1784, "she told me she found she could not live without corresponding with Mr Alison and seeing him sometimes; upon which I set forth to her the imprudence of her engagement, on which she fell into hysterics, then fainting fits, and lay as it were dead for some minutes. I saw then she would marry immediately if I did not allow her to see him a few times, as he was then in London, and by this compliance I should retard her indiscreet marriage; so I consented." But Dorothea, far from being satisfied with this scanty indulgence, went to Edinburgh, made interest with a friend who procured Mr Alison a living of £150 a year: it was one third more than the minimum she was ready to accept; therefore the wedding could no longer be delayed. Mrs Montagu's consent was again

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applied for, and refused. Dorothea then "determined to quit all connection with her," and to marry. Mrs Montagu doubtless felt indignant at this rejection of her advice: "I should with great joy have given very solid proofs of my approbation to any man of character and decent circumstances, for happiness does not attend on wealth, but misery dogs poverty at the heels." She could hardly understand Dorothea's violence and obstinacy, so foreign to the soberness of her own nature: "Miss Gregory's behaviour," she says in her painful surprise, "had been so gentle, amiable and discreet, and with such appearance of affection, and attachment to me, that to see her sacrifice all prudent considerations of every kind, and all friendly connection with me, to a man she had not known ten weeks has been a great affliction." Her cold reason could not explain or measure the irresistible force of such passion. It must have seemed to her grossly instinctive, repugnant to the pure intellectual refinement alone worthy of a cultivated mind.

In her own case, she had forgotten neither circumspection nor dignity. Resolved to give her hand and heart only to a man of character

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and fortune "so established that one piece of generosity should not hurt his fortune, nor one act of indiscretion prejudice his character,"[1] she had, in 1742,[2] fixed her choice on Mr Edward Montagu, a mathematician and Member of Parliament for Huntingdon, twenty-nine years her senior, and highly respected as the grandson of the "great Earl of Sandwich,"[3] as the possessor of valuable estates at Rokeby, at Allerthorpe in Yorkshire, and as the owner of a house in Dover Street, London. He had brought wealth to her, and she had cheered his existence by her conversation and constant good humour. On their union of the liveliness of youth and of the seriousness of age, they seem to have always congratulated themselves. He felt affection for her, and she gratitude for him. "I have the honour and happiness," she wrote in her grandiloquent style a few months after her marriage, "to be made the guest of a heart furnished with the best and greatest virtues, honesty, and

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 110.

[2] The wedding took place on the 5th of August.

[3] "Lord High Admiral of the Fleet to Charles II. (Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 111).

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integrity, and universal benevolence, with the most engaging affection to every one who particularly belongs to him; no desire of power but to do good, no use of it but to make happy. . . . Since I married, I have never heard him say an ill-natured word to any one, nor have I received one matrimonial frown."[1] In her letters to him, she ever subscribed herself "your most *grateful* wife." When her little boy was born, she had even intended to wrap herself up in her domestic felicity and to sacrifice her intellectual pursuits, the delight of earlier years, to the "pleasure of living with those" she loved and esteemed. "For amusement," she exclaimed in her maternal fondness, "no puppet-show is like the pleasant humours of my own Punch."[2] Alas! poor "Punch" died in infancy, to her great grief and Mr Montagu's. We agree with Mrs Climenson[3] in thinking "that this poignant and irreparable loss turned Elizabeth Montagu's thoughts more strongly to literature and knowledge of all kind." In Dover Street, and, after June 1747, in Hill Street, she began to form the social circle which was gradually

[1] *Letters*, ii., 229-30. [2] *Ibid.*, 292.
[3] Vol. i., 192.

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to extend for more than thirty years. In her country residences, at Allerthorpe in the North, and at Sandleford near Newbury in Berkshire, she found the repose necessary to her constitution, overstrained by the fatigues of the London winter season. She disliked the country, Yorkshire especially, as much as ever. "The good folks" that visited her "poor tabernacle" there, she described as "drunken and vicious, and, worse than hypocrites, profligates." "Most of the ladies in the neighbourhood," she went on, "have more hogs in their dining-room than ever they had in their hog-sty."[1] Sandleford, however, became at length a favourite place with her. It was an old "priory," which Mr Montagu had leased in 1730 from the Chapter of Windsor. "The situation is on an eminence," wrote the poet and philosopher Beattie in 1784, "with a gentle slope of a quarter of a mile towards the south; and, from every part of the lawn, there is a beautiful prospect, first of a romantic village called Newtown, and, beyond that, of the Hampshire hills, some of which are tufted with wood, and others bare, and green, and smooth to

[1] *Letters*, ii., 231-2.

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the top."[1] A little rivulet, the Enborne, or a branch of it, wandered "unheard and unseen through a venerable grove of oaks," but was afterwards "collected into two large and beautiful pieces of water, round which the walks and grounds were laid out to very great advantage indeed." "At a distance of about thirty yards from the house, stood" an old chapel, "which for a century past or more, had been neglected or used as a place for lumber. This, Mrs Montagu," in her later days, "transformed into a very magnificent room, and joined to the main body of the house by a colonnade; which, expanding in the middle, and rising to the height of thirty feet at least, formed a noble drawing-room of an elliptical shape. When the doors of these rooms were thrown open, the walk, from end to end, was upwards of an hundred feet, and the height and breadth proportionable." In this "sylvan palace," under the "arched roofs" of her "twilight groves," Mrs Montagu spent many summers in her married life and widowhood.[2] Some-

[1] *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie, LL.D.*, by Sir WILLIAM FORBES, 1807, ii., 341-2.

[2] Her husband died in May 1775.

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times, the care of her health drove her to the waters of Tunbridge, Sunning Hill, or Bath, when the rheumatism or the "cramp in the stomach" grew painful; but, more frequently, she fled from the dust of Dover Street, Hill Street, or Portman Square, to Sandleford which, through Maidenhead, Reading, and Newbury, she could reach in one day. There she took her peaceful "airings," quietly drank her tea, and then retired to "her dressing-room for two or three hours" with her cherished companions, her books; or, on fine afternoons, her desk and she were placed "under the shade of some noble elms, which partly excluded the garish eye of day,"[1] whilst her pen or "grey goose-quill" ran apace on the sheets destined to her correspondents and to posterity.

Her social influence was chiefly founded on her wealth, which she helped her husband in administering, and, after his death, administered herself with the most vigilant care. Her prudent economy and practical sense made her a notable housekeeper. We hear

[1] On Sandleford, cf. *Letters*, ii., 262-3; and iii., 183, 256.

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of her at Sandleford as being "deep in accounts" and "travelling from tubs of soap to firkins of butter, and from thence to chaldrons of coal."[1] In June 1758, the decease of John Rogers, a first cousin[2] of Mr Montagu's, brought her "a large accession of fortune," together with "the usual accompaniment of riches: a great deal of business, a great deal of hurry, and a great many ceremonious engagements." She enjoyed her importance as an agriculturist and owner of coal-mines. She patronised her farmers and "pitmen" with stately condescension. If they did not love, they certainly admired, their grand lady. In July 1775, two months after Mr Montagu's death, she went on a progress through her domains, from Darlington to Newcastle and "Denton Hall," "an old Gothic mansion," whose windows, built before the union with Scotland, were fitter "to exclude arrows and missive weapons" than "to admit the rays of the sun."[3] "On the 3rd of July,"

[1] *Letters*, iv., 42.

[2] By his mother, Sarah Rogers. Cf. Mrs CLIMENSON, i., 111; ii., 128-9—and *Letters*, iv., 74.

[3] *MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 349. Elizabeth Montagu to the Duchess of Portland.

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she writes,[1] "I got as far as my estate at Burniston," near Darlington. "Exactly opposite to some of my land, there is a tolerable inn. I eat a hasty dinner, and, taking my steward with me, went over many of the farms, and sent invitations to my tenants to dine with me the next day." In this reiteration of the possessive, we read the joy and pride of the possessor. The next day, therefore, attended by her steward, she dined, surrounded by her farmers' wives and "young lasses." Farther north, the scene changed; instead of green fields, she found "a brown crust, with here and there a black hole of a coal-pit." Of her own Denton, she said: "It has mightily the air of an ant-hill; a vast many black animals for ever busy. Near fourscore families are employed on my concerns here. Boys work in the colliery from seven years of age." But, as "the good souls, men and women," were very apt to get drunk, and then "to sing and dance and hollow and whoop," she dared not treat them like her Burniston people; she contented herself "with killing

[1] DORAN'S *A Lady of the Last Century*, pp. 196, 199-200.

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a fat beast once a week, and sending to each family, once, a piece of meat." A most generous and "kind landlady" indeed! But the "pitmen" were pleased with what she deigned to give: "some apparel" for their unclothed children, some "cheap rice, skimmed milk and coarse beef" as a regale for the poor hungry little things. The fathers, to her "great comfort," were heard to sing at the bottom of the pit. And she, at Sandleford or London, erected "palaces" with the produce of their toil.

To her prudence in the conduct of life corresponded her extreme moderation in things political. A Conformist by nature and education, she kept to the beaten track, and shrank from all innovation. "If I had a son," she declared, "I should desire him never to wander single in quest of adventures. Virtue, wisdom, honours, prosperity, happiness, are all to be found on the turnpike-road, or not to be found at all."[1] Though she could admire William Pitt's daring, she had formed a "little Englander's" ideal, before the phrase was known. The true patriot she conceived to be the guardian of

[1] DORAN, p. 187.

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his country's safety, "a far better citizen than the ambitious man, who enlarges its dominions."[1] She took a merchant's delight in the fair sights and fruits of peace: "I got a very pleasant walk on the sea-shore," she wrote from Sunderland in 1758; "several ships were sailing out of the harbour, fraught only with the comforts and conveniences of life; they carry out coals and salt, and bring home money. I question whether those who carry out death and bring home glory, are concerned in so good merchandise. . . ."[2] A true child of her time, she distrusted enthusiasm, in whatever shape. Lady Huntingdon, the founder of the famous Calvinistic "connection," she deemed a fanatic, who made herself "ridiculous to the profane, and dangerous to the good."[3] Fox's zeal for liberty was, in her eyes, part of his general looseness,[4] and, though she had originally shared the mild Whig opinions of her husband and of the Portlands, she at last sided with Pitt against Fox, with

[1] *Letters*, i., 216 (1741).
[2] *Ibid.*, iv., 99.
[3] *Ibid.*, 18.
[4] DORAN, p. 346, in December 1788, about the Regency Bill.

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Hastings against Burke, with Burke against the French Revolution. Her admiration of the latter's virulent *Reflections* stands on record in Madame d'Arblay's pages: "It is a tribute to its excellence," says the Diarist, "which reflects high honour on Mrs Montagu's candour, as she was one of those the most vehemently irritated against its author but a short time since."[1] Indeed, so self-possessed a person could not be expected to approve the Revolutionists, these frenzied levellers!

IV

Such having been Mrs Montagu's character in youth and age, we now proceed to show by what insensible steps she was led to authorship. For her introduction into the world of letters she was indebted, as we shall see, to two or three of her most intimate friends.

On the 3rd of May 1758, she wrote to her sister, Sarah Scott: "Miss Carter is to dine with me to-morrow; she is a most amiable,

[1] *Diary and Letters*, iii., 302 (23rd November 1790).

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modest, gentle creature, not *hérissée de grec*, nor blown up with self-opinion."[1] The lady thus mentioned for the first time in the Correspondence was no other than the anonymous contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* and to the *Rambler*, the writer of the celebrated *Ode to Wisdom*, which Richardson had inserted in his *Clarissa*, the learned translator and commentator of Epictetus, whose scholarly work and Christian preface had appeared in the preceding April, revised and approved by Dr Secker, Bishop of Oxford. Three years older than Mrs Montagu, she had long passed her prime. She was the daughter of the Perpetual Curate of Deal in Kent, where she lived surrounded by her father's numerous family. In spite of her household cares and of her natural slowness, she had contrived to become a prodigy of learning. At a time when a knowledge of Latin and Greek was a remarkable achievement in a woman, she had added to these German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, even Hebrew and Arabic.[2] But she had bought such distinc-

[1] *Letters*, iv., 11.

[2] *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs Elizabeth Carter*, by the Rev. MONTAGU PENNINGTON, 1808, i., 12-16.

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tion at the cost of her health. In her desire to overcome what she thought her indolence, she used to rise between four and five in the morning, at the bidding of a bell rung by the sexton, and this ruthless treatment had caused headaches which tormented her through life. Her strength of will and elevation of purpose were reflected in her demeanour: "Really a noble-looking woman," Miss Burney exclaimed on seeing her at Bath in 1780, "I never saw age so graceful in the female sex yet; her whole face seems to beam with goodness, piety, and philanthropy."[1] Indeed, the qualities of the heart were in her superior to those of the head; in her friendship with Mrs Montagu, she brought a richness of feeling, a depth of sympathy which the latter was deficient in. The stability of her faith, unshaken by doubt, gave to her thought and temper a cheerful, optimistic tone, which supported her in sickness or trouble, and enabled her to look undismayed on the prospect of the grave: "How terrible," she said, "to close one's eyes upon the flowery earth and radiant sun, and sink into a cold,

[1] *Diary and Letters*, i., 269.

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dark, eternal night! . . . From all this dreadful extinction, God be thanked, we are graciously secured."[1] Though so pious that Mr Montagu disliked her conversation as too serious,[2] she was no prude; she could enjoy the "surprising variety of nature, wit, *morality* and good sense" to be met with in *Joseph Andrews*, the "spirit of benevolence" that "runs through the whole" and "renders it peculiarly charming." Tom Jones she acknowledged to be an imperfect character, for all his "honesty, good-nature and generosity"; nobody could admire *Clarissa* more than she; but "I am afraid," she went on, "that Fielding's book is the most natural representation of what passes in the world."[3] Its broad humanity, clear laughter, healthy enjoyment of this pleasant earth went to her heart. Loving the world for the sake of its Maker, she tasted with an epicure's relish all the innocent little pleasures within her reach. "Que je vous plains de n'être pas folle de la musique!" she once wrote to her friend

[1] *Memoirs of Mrs Carter*, i., 416-7

[2] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 246.

[3] Cf. Mrs CARTER'S *Letters to Miss Talbot*, ed. 1819, i., 19, 261-2.

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Miss Talbot.[1] "I seldom hear an agreeable air but it recalls to my mind almost every pleasing occurrence of my life." Her unfeigned admiration of the beauties of Nature speaks a poetic soul in her better than does her moral verse. Whether furious or calm, the sea is a source of delight to her. She observes it from her window "every hour in the day; and every hour it wears some new appearance, if it be only from the various colourings it receives from the shifting clouds. At this moment, it is displaying all the grandeur of a storm; and the waves of the Goodwin Sands which terminate our prospect are dashing against the clouds."[2] On fine evenings, she would sit on the shore, "soothed by the murmurs of the ebbing tide and the glimmerings of moonlight on the waves."[3] Her frequent headaches made her an indefatigable walker; on her return from London, where she generally spent the winter, she sometimes left the coach at Canterbury, sixteen miles from Deal, and

[1] Cf. Mrs CARTER'S *Letters to Miss Talbot*, ed. 1819 i., 136-7.

[2] *Letters from Mrs Carter to Mrs Montagu*, 1817, iii., 24 (1777).

[3] *Ibid.*, 35.

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finished her journey on foot, wandering "over hill and dale without control," sitting down "to rest on a bank embroidered by violets and primroses,"[1] or beholding with sudden rapture the unexpected splendour of a "honeysuckle,"[2] singled out by the sun-beams from amidst the deep verdure of a "shady lane." This kindly feeling, this power of loving lovable men and things made her at once different from, and indispensable to, Mrs Montagu, who, moreover, respected, and perhaps envied her for her literary fame.

A still more illustrious personage joined the two friends at Tunbridge in 1761, and formed an intimacy with them for the short remainder of his life. This was Lord Bath,[3] better known as William Pulteney,[4] the

[1] *Letters from Mrs Carter to Mrs Montagu*, 1817, ii., 303 (May 1775).

[2] *Ibid.*, i., 117 (September 1761).

[3] Mrs Montagu had made his acquaintance so early as 1753 (Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 29), and renewed it at Tunbridge and London in August and December 1760.

[4] On his character, see CHESTERFIELD'S "Mr Pulteney" (*The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope*, ed. Bradshaw, 1893, iii., 1415-6); LADY HERVEY'S *Letters*, ed. 1821, pp. 22-4, 306; *Memoirs of Mrs Elizabeth Carter*, ed. 1808, i., 239-41; Lord EDMUND FITZMAURICE'S *Shelburne*, 1875, i., 45; and WM. E. H. LECKY, *A History of England*, ed. 1891, i., 374-5.

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former colleague, whom resentment had made the bitter adversary, of Sir Robert Walpole, once a leader among politicians and wits, but long since "shrunk into insignificancy and an Earldom." A master of "sharp, cutting" sarcasm, "an elegant scholar," he had been considered, before he retired into "that hospital of incurables," the House of Lords, as "a most complete orator and debater" in the Commons, as a man to be dreaded for his sudden bursts of passion "supported by great personal courage." Twenty years had elapsed since his ambitious hopes and his popularity had been for ever ruined by his refusal to take the reins of government from his conquered rival's hands. He had almost sunk into the obscurity of private life, with a wife whose peevish, avaricious temper[1] was such, that she could "gather together eight hundred Christian souls" at an assembly, and send them home without giving them "a biscuit or a bit of bread" to eat. To Lord Bath's great joy, death had taken her away in 1758, and, though he was thought to have kept

[1] She was nicknamed "the wife of Bath" by her acquaintance.

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too much of her stinginess, though "his bounty was not equal to the opportunities he enjoyed of exerting it," yet he could be generous when his affections were engaged,[1]

[1] In April 1761, he sent through Mrs Montagu to Mrs Carter "two bank bills of 20 pounds each," to "make her fine when she comes to Tunbridge" (Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 235). In an undated letter, Mrs Montagu thus acknowledges the gift:—

"Your lordship's present to Mrs Carter is so noble, that I am very desirous it should go to her as it is. If it had been of a fourth part the value, I should have wished to have done it as you first suggested, and the witt and politeness of your lordship's letter would have added such a grace to the present as must have given her great pleasure, but realy, my lord, your great bounty has now made it such as will be of true service to her. I think I know enough of her heart to pronounce that such a proof of regard from my Lord Bath will in itself be pleasing to the highest degree; but as she is full of delicacies, I must, by gently trying the ground, feel out the way, and if I can do it to-day, your lordship shall hear from me to-morrow morning. I will not tell your lordship how much my mind was affected by the manner of your doing this generous act. I have in my life known people who could give, but I never yet met with any one who could do it in your manner. Your lordship does not tell me whether the pain in your side is better; is it that it is not better, or that you think I do not care whether it is or not? I hope that is the case, for I can excuse any thing in my friends rather than their being ill. I must tell your lordship that I cannot possibly send the bank bills to Mrs Carter without letting her know from whence they come, for she would probably

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and in the familiar ease of social intercourse he proved "the most agreeable, the most entertaining, and the most lively companion imaginable," gifted with "an infinite deal of wit, which his great good-nature prevented from being offensive to any one," and free from all vanity or importance.

In the summer of 1763, one year before his death, Lord Bath and the Montagus, accompanied by the Earl's Chaplain, Dr Douglas, and by Mrs Carter, went in a party to drink the waters at Spa. An interesting account of their journey, preserved in the *Carter Memoirs*,[1] naïvely expresses the travellers' astonishment at finding the vanquished, enslaved country little, if at all, inferior to their own. On

imagine they came from me, and I should rather rob your lordship upon Hounslow Heath the next time you go to Ives Place, for in that case I should only take your gold, but here I should steal from you the grace of an action, and the proof [of] a mind above all gold. I wonder that a person of your lordship's classical learning, so well acquainted with the story of Midas's queen, could imagine that I could keep the secret from any inducement whatever, but I have given you a reason why it is absolutely impossible besides my general incapability of keeping a secret. . . ." (Broadley Collection).

[1] Vol. i., 249-376.

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their arrival at Calais, after a five hours' passage, they expected to see the gaunt, starving wretches, with bare feet or wooden shoes, whom Hogarth had engraved or painted, leaving the fat of the land to the jolly, lazy monks. In fact, they did see, in crossing the market-place, "such a mixture of rags, and dirt, and finery, as was entirely new to the English spectator. The women at the stalls, who looked as if they were by no means possessed of any thing like a shift, were decorated with long, dangling earrings." Yet, even at "Calais gate," there stood an excellent hostelry, the *Lion d'Argent*, with "large, comfortable rooms" and very good beds, "a much better inn," truly, than any to be found at Dover! And the "*politesse*, the *empressement pour vous servir*, among the lower kind of people" seemed so very engaging that it was quite pleasant to talk to them. "There is a little *perruquier*, with a most magnificent queue, belonging to the inn, with whom I am upon the most friendly terms imaginable," said the excellent Mrs Carter. Further inland, roads and villages appeared "perfectly good." St Omer was "a very pretty town," with hand-

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some houses, streets wide and well-paved, which, to the mortification of their "English vanity," was the case with every town the travellers passed through. Lisle, "a large and very fine city," struck them by the uncomfortable look given to the houses by "strong, iron cross-bars before the windows." But its environs presented "charming views." Everywhere the "fields were highly cultivated"; the people looked "very clean," and had "nothing of that air of poverty and wretchedness that one should have expected in a land of slavery." Thus wondering, they crossed the frontier into "the territories of the Empress Queen," and at Courtray beheld "the feast *du saint Sacrement.* Whenever the priest came from beneath the canopy and elevated the Hostia, all the people fell on their knees in the streets." Along an admirable highway "paved with flat stones, and bordered with very fine trees, like an avenue to a great house," they reached Brussels, whose sordid, crooked aspect disappointed them. "It is the most disagreeable town which I have yet seen in our way," wrote Mrs Carter; "the houses are extremely high, and the streets narrow,

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which makes it dark and close; and I shall be heartily glad when we leave it." Liège, at the bottom of its long and steep hill, was still worse: its ugliness seemed enhanced by that of its inhabitants, who had "the worst look of any human creatures I ever saw," declared their unkind visitor. Thence, a twenty-one miles' dangerous drive through woods and along precipices conducted the friends to Spa, where they stayed two months, drinking in due course at the three springs, the Sauveniere, the Pouhon, and the Geronsterre, one "in the midst of the village," whose water was little used except at dinner, another at about two miles' distance, "on the top of a hill, with woods and rocks and precipices all around," the third further still. At six o'clock every morning they repaired to the second of these springs. "The time of drinking," we are informed, "lasts little more than an hour, and then we return to breakfast, but tea is absolutely prohibited to all the water-drinkers. There is nothing but mere sauntering from this time till we dress for dinner at two; and about five begin visiting and going to the rooms; then supper, and to bed before ten."

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On the 17th of August they took leave of the mixed society assembled in this international resort, where everybody, not excepting the Germans,[1] spoke French. Along the Rhine and through Holland they returned to England. At Wesel, these fine ladies and gentlemen had to sleep in "troughs filled with musty straw, and a very thin sort of bed laid over it." Near Arnheim, they crossed the Rhine "over a bridge of boats so shattered that every board shook, and there was no fence on either side." Nor were the causeways or "dykes" in Holland much safer, with their "perpendicular descent on each side to the toaderies and froggeries below." Such roads were good, but so narrow that, if two carriages met, one of them had to pass "within a few inches of the edge." After these varied and sometimes

[1] In imitation of the Prussian philosopher and king, Frederick the Great. This affectation was sometimes carried to a most ridiculous excess. One day, for instance, a German lady was mentioning to Mrs Carter GESSNER'S *Death of Abel*, "which she had read only in the French translation," as "she did not understand her own language well enough to be able to read the original," and, according to Mrs Carter, "this laudable ignorance of their mother-tongue is really the case with many of them" (*Memoirs*, i., 322).

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perilous experiences, Mrs Carter, who had suffered much from headaches, was glad to reach Deal again, whilst the Montagus proceeded to the north to inspect their collieries.

Of all the acquaintances made in early life by Miss Robinson, none turned out to be of more importance to her than that with "Mr George Lyttelton," the future lord. On 1st January 1760, she wrote to him: "Can I begin the new year more auspiciously than by dedicating the first hours of the New Year's Day to that person from whose friendship I hope to derive so much of the honour and happiness of my life?"[1] At that date their acquaintance was of some twenty years' standing. In the world of fashion, where she had been introduced by the Duchess of Portland, Miss Robinson had soon singled out this "fine gentleman," equally remarkable by his birth and talents, the son of a wealthy Worcestershire baronet, the owner, some day, of Hagley Park, of its ancient mansion and "enchanting scenes,"[2] the author of compositions in verse and prose,

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 178.

[2] See the picturesque description in WALPOLE'S *Letters*, ed. Toynbee, iii., 185-6.

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always elegant, "let the subject be ever so trifling."[1] Though "Mr Lyttelton's" choice of a wife had not answered Fidget's secret wishes, her admiration had known no decline. Her polite, flattering encomiums on his productions rather increased in warmth as time went on. In 1747, she lamented with him the death of his beloved "Lucy," and deemed the poet's once famous *Monody* on his loss extremely pretty, describing as it did "a most delicate and tender affection."[2] When, in 1759, "Lord" Lyttelton improved his "bad and old" ancestral house into "a magnificent edifice," and sent to Mrs Montagu the first volumes of his ponderous *Henry II.*, she united the praises of the historian, of his residence and his park, in the same rounded periods. "Your Hagley oaks," she said, "will derive additional honour from you. . . . The having been your lordship's will make them sacred with posterity: if there be one more noble than the rest, the honour of having shaded Lord Lyttelton while he wrote his *History of Henry II.* will be ascribed to it, and every genius devoted to the daughters

[1] Mrs MONTAGU'S *Letters*, i., 133.
[2] *Ibid.*, iii., 46.

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of memory will make a pilgrimage thither."[1] Let us hope that all was not mere rhetoric in this eulogy, in her comparison of Robertson to a "Scotch fir," waving its "high top, in sign of worship," to the Hagley oak, and that she really believed in Lyttelton's superiority. Her partiality for a friend is, after all, pardonable, if sincere. But most of her contemporaries would have demurred to her fervid panegyric of Lyttelton as a man and a writer. Comparing his work with Hume's and Robertson's, Gibbon declared that "he could not aspire to the fame of these men of genius, that he possessed, however, the qualities of a good patriot, of a well-informed, accurate, and impartial historian,"[2] but no higher ones. To say the truth, he never rose, in politics or in literature, much above the level of "honest mediocrity." His unprepossessing aspect and address made him ridiculous in all but Fidget's eyes. "With the figure of a spectre and the gesticulations of a puppet," says Horace Walpole, "he

[1] *Letters*, iv., 227.

[2] *Mémoires littéraires de la Grande Bretagne* pour 1767, art. i., 29. Cf. also GIBBON'S *Autobiographies*, ed. Murray, 1897, p. 279.

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talked heroics through his nose, made declamations at a visit, and played at cards with scraps of history or sentences of Pindar."[1] He sat to Chesterfield for his portrait of the absent-minded "Laputan wrapped in intense thought, and possibly sometimes in no thought at all. He leaves his hat in one room," continues the satirist, "his sword in another, and would leave his shoes in a third, if his buckles, though awry, did not save them; his legs and arms, by his awkward management of them, seem to have undergone the *question extraordinaire*; and his head, always hanging upon one or other of his shoulders, seems to have received the first stroke upon the block."[2] Virtue and learning all judges, even Chesterfield, granted him; but not a ray of genius, they thought, and not too unjustly thought,[3] ever illuminated his "studied orations," his "elegant" verses, his weighty theological or historical disquisitions, respectable indeed, yet dull.

[1] *Memoirs of George II.*, ed. 1847, i., 202-3.

[2] Lord CHESTERFIELD'S *Letters*, ed. Bradshaw, 1893, i., 245-6. Cf. also Lord HERVEY'S *Memoirs of George II.*; Lord WALDEGRAVE'S *Memoirs*, ed. 1821, pp. 25-6; and SHELBURNE'S *Autobiography*, ed. Fitzmaurice, p. 74.

[3] Some passages of the *Monody* excepted.

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His *Dialogues of the Dead*, published in May 1760, though not to be excepted from this general censure, possess a peculiar interest for us, as the last three, composed "by a different hand," were the production of Mrs Montagu, who thus appeared for the first time before the public as an anonymous writer. One of them, the twenty-sixth of the whole collection, consists of a conversation between "Cadmus and Hercules" on the comparative value to mankind of heroic strength and of the civilising arts and sciences: it deserves to the full the praise of seriousness, good sense and solidity, which a French contemporary critic[1] bestowed on a transla-

[1] Cf. FRÉRON'S *Année Littéraire*, 1761, ii., 96: "Il y a dans ces Dialogues plus de sens que de ce qu'on appelle esprit, plus de vérité que de brillant, plus de solidité que de finesse, et par là je les crois plus instructifs pour l'esprit et plus utiles pour les mœurs que ceux de Lucain (*sic*) et de Fontenelle." In England, the critics were divided: Lord Chesterfield (Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 181, 207) and perhaps Lady Hervey spoke and wrote warmly in their favour; on the contrary, Horace Walpole, who called them "Dead Dialogues" (*Letters*, ed. Toynbee, iv., 389-91), Johnson, who pronounced them "a nugatory performance," and Lord Bath were hostile. They are perhaps still remembered in France on account of Lyttelton's short correspondence with Voltaire on the subject (cf. VOLTAIRE'S *Œuvres complètes*, ed. 1880, xl., 534-6, and xli., 44-5).

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tion of the book.[1] In the flat monotony of its moralisings, it rivals Lyttelton's dulness; Hercules' soft speech and weak objections remind us of his distaff rather than of his club; his fiercest utterance is that, were Eurystheus to set him to work again, a worse task than any he performed should be imposed upon him; he should be made to read through a great library, "and I would," cries the demi-god, "serve it as I did the Hydra, I would burn as I went on." The voluble Cadmus has become in the Elysian Fields a perfect utilitarian. "Poetry," he contends, "is of excellent use, to enable the memory to retain with more ease, and to imprint with more energy upon the heart, precepts of virtue and virtuous actions."[2]

[1] Three of them are known to us: one by JEAN DES CHAMPS, Prêtre de l'Eglise anglicane, Ministre de la Chapelle Roïale de la Savoye . . . published in London, G. Seyffert, October or November 1760, under Lyttelton's supervision (cf. Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 186-7, and Mrs MONTAGU'S *Letters*, iv., 312); another by "M. le Professeur de JONCOURT," also printed in 1760, but at La Haye, chez Pierre de Hondt; the third (anonymous), "faite sur la 4e édition, A Amsterdam, chez M. Magerus, 1767."

[2] *Dialogues of the Dead*, London, 1760 (anon.), pp. 294, 296.

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The mnemonic qualities of verse are its chief, perhaps its only, recommendation, in the opinion of this Ancient, converted to a very modern kind of philosophy. Livelier in repartee and wittier in expression is the second of these Dialogues, between "Mercury and a fine Lady," a Mrs Modish, who, summoned by "the grim messenger" to pass the Styx, insists on delay, as she happens to be "engaged, absolutely engaged." Fidget's good-humoured raillery sparkles all through this pleasant little piece, more like Lucian's famous compositions than anything else in the book. To Mrs Montagu's great joy, her ironical sketch of the fashionable Mrs Modish became "a favourite with the town; but some ladies," she added, "have tossed up their heads, and said it was abominably satirical."[1] It had been suggested to her by a recent incident: when the notorious Lord Ferrers, guilty of murdering his steward, was tried by his peers, "the ladies crowded to the House of Lords to see a wretch brought loaded with crime and shame to the Bar, to hear sentence of a cruel and ignominious death." Shocked at such inhumanity, she

[1] *Letters*, iv., 259-62.

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vented her indignation in her portrait of Mrs Modish, ever engaged, not in her family, but in a perpetual round of dissipations and visits. "Look on my chimney-piece," exclaims the fair victim to her pitiless conductor, "and you will see I was engaged to the play on Mondays, balls on Tuesdays, the opera on Saturdays, and to card assemblies the rest of the week, for two months to come, and it would be the rudest thing in the world not to keep my appointments. If you will stay for me till the summer season, I will wait on you with all my heart. Perhaps the Elysian Fields may be less detestable than the country in our world. Pray, have you a fine Vauxhall and Ranelagh? I think I should not dislike drinking the Lethe waters when you have a full season."[1]

This elegant and characteristic passage is the best sample we can give of Mrs Montagu's literary style in her three dialogues. The twenty-eighth and last, between Plutarch and a modern bookseller, partakes of the defects and merits of the former two. Plutarch, now turned Christian moralist, proses at a length that his great age may excuse; the book-

[1] *Dialogues*, 1760, p. 301.

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seller, astonished to find himself in a world "so absolutely the reverse of that he left, that here authors domineer over booksellers," is marked by a gruff stolidness that produces some humorous effects. He nourishes a special grudge against his very adviser, Plutarch, for "having almost occasioned his ruin." "When I first set up shop," he explains, "understanding but little of business, I unadvisedly bought an edition of your *Lives*; a pack of old Greeks and Romans, which cost me a great sum of money. I could never get off above twenty sets of them," laments this disconsolate dealer, who, however, recouped himself by publishing *The Lives of the Highwaymen* and *The Lives of Men that never Lived*.[1]

The writing of these trifles filled Mrs Montagu's leisure hours, and brought her some fame. "The Dialogues, I mean the three worst, have had a more favourable reception than I expected," she wrote in May to Mrs Carter. "They are now mostly given to the true author." During her stay at Tunbridge in the same year, "an old Quaker of four score, . . . one of the greatest chymists

[1] *Dialogues*, pp. 307, 309.

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in Europe," took a fancy to her, because he would believe her to be, in spite of all she could assert, the writer of certain Dialogues, and this unexpected friend sat by her and attended on her with the utmost assiduity.[1] Mrs Carter, of course, was all praise: "It is downright scandal to say," she declared, "that Cadmus talks like a pedant; he has all the elegance of polite literature; and it is equally scandalous to suspect that Mrs Modish wants the power of amusing."[2] Encouraged by such approbation, Mrs Montagu thought it not impossible that "she might at last become an author in form." "It enlarges the sphere of action, and lengthens the short period of human life," she wrote, thus revealing her secret ambition. It was, after all, a noble one, a sort of purified, intellectual vanity. To the social importance her wealth gave her, she felt that literary fame would add lustre and

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 190.

[2] *Letters from Mrs Elizabeth Carter to Mrs Montagu*, 1817, i., 83-4. The *Année Littéraire* (*loc. cit.*) is, however, less favourable: "Vous trouverez les trois derniers dialogues inférieurs à ceux que je viens de parcourir," says the critic who, for all his severity, has some indulgence for Mrs Modish: "Le Dialogue vingt-septième caractérise assez bien une petite maîtresse qui n'a aimé ni son mari ni ses enfants."

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influence on the world of letters. With this view, she henceforward turned her attention towards criticism, Shakespearian criticism in particular.

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CHAPTER II

THE *ESSAY ON SHAKESPEARE*

I

FROM the numerous judgments on books scattered through her published correspondence, we may gather that Mrs Montagu's literary criticism will be distinguished, we do not say by depth of insight, but by much good sense and some breadth of view. Though far from simple in her own manner and style, she has no patience with pedants, even with their most eminent representative in those days, William Warburton. When his edition of Shakespeare came out in 1747, she read his explanatory Notes on the text, and found them "most extraordinary." "He seems to proceed," she wrote, "by new rules of criticism, and makes Shakespeare speak as he prompts him, though ever so wide from his words or seeming meaning; the word *means*, he changes for *medicines* . . . indeed

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he too often makes poor Shakespeare talk like an apothecary." She ridicules several of the future Bishop's so-called emendations: in *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, Capulet, overjoyed at his daughter's feigned consent to marry "the county Paris," declares, in praise of "Friar Laurence," her counsellor, that the "whole city is much bound to him."[1] Warburton, however, was not satisfied with this. Desirous to improve the line, he "most sagaciously" turned it thus: this friar, "the city is much obliged to hymn,' for "to hymn is to laud, and to laud is to praise," "and so," Mrs Montague ironically remarks, "by incredible pains and a new verb, he makes you understand the city should praise the friar."[2] Exaggeration she constantly reproves, even though the criticised writer should not possess all her sympathy: "I must tell you," she informs her friend, Dr Beattie, "that Samuel Johnson says of Lord Chesterfield's 'Instructions to his Son' that they are to teach the manners of a dancing-master, with the morals of a prostitute. The sentence is too severe to be

[1] *Romeo and Juliet*, Act iv., sc. 2, l. 32.
[2] *Letters*, iii., 50.

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perfectly just, and the character too short to be perfectly descriptive; but there is something too near truth, and too like description."[1] Dr Young's *Letter on Original Composition*, with its "vernal imagination" profuse of "violets and primroses," and its bland exhortation to "people to look sharp for genius, which he fancies many would find if they sought it," provokes an amused smile in her. "The doctor was so positive in his assurances," she laughingly goes on, "that I set about seeking for my genius; and, as I had bottled very little hay, hoped to find it presently; but I am no nearer the matter."[2] Sagacity and caustic wit are, however, qualities which go to the making of the purely carping critic: from this excess Mrs Montagu was saved by her extensive reading. Ever fond of new intellectual pleasures, she was ready to appreciate the beauties of the Ancients and of the Moderns with perfect impartiality. She admired Sophocles, though in an English dress: "The *Œdipus Coloneus* affected me extremely," she wrote to Lord

[1] *Life and Writings of James Beattie*, by Sir WILLIAM FORBES, ii., 63, 30th April 1774.

[2] *Letters*, iv., 184-5.

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Lyttelton, "and would have done so more, if it had not been for the constant presence of the chorus; but the passions are awed and checked by a crowd."[1] French comedy delighted her no less than Greek tragedy; she considered the *Misanthrope* as a masterpiece, and could point out, with commendable acuteness, the essential feature of Alceste's fine character. His error, she said, though everywhere visible, is nowhere monstrous; "the Misanthrope has the same moroseness in his love-suit and his law-suit; he is as rigid and severe to a bad verse as a bad action, and as strict in a salutation in the street or address in a drawing-room, as he would be in his testimony in a court of justice: right in the principle, wrong only in the excess, you cannot hate him when he is unpleasant, nor despise him when he is absurd."[2] The "grace, ease, elegance, and sprightliness" of Madame de Sévigné's epistolary style did not escape her, though so different from her own florid pompousness; she thought the amiable Frenchwoman's letters "delightful" as such, and "valuable as giving the manners of the times and

[1] *Letters*, iv., 275. [2] *Ibid.*, 264.

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characters of the principal persons of the Court."[1] And if we compare her judgments on English contemporary literature with those of Johnson, we are struck by his narrowness and her catholicity. Weighing *Clarissa Harlowe* in her critical scales, she finds "the story very affecting" and interesting, "though it wants two of the greatest merits of a narration, elegance and brevity." Lovelace, however, she objects to, as being an unnatural compound of too many inconsistencies.[2] It seems to us that this calm discernment contrasts favourably with Johnson's perfervid enthusiasm for Richardson. She never would have written or said that "there is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's than in all *Tom Jones*."[3] Her classical orthodoxy, her sincere admiration of Pope's correctness did not make her indifferent or hostile to the literary innovations of the time: long before the publication of Percy's *Reliques*, she felt that there were no love verses that seemed "suggested by the heart and softened in the language, like

[1] *MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 338.

[2] *Letters*, iii., 100-1.

[3] BOSWELL'S *Life of Johnson*, Globe edition, 1894, p. 235.

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some Scotch songs."[1] She described Gray's *Bard* as a web woven for Edward's line "with the noblest images of poetry";[2] she immediately accepted Macpherson's *Highland Poems* as genuine,[3] and, when travelling in 1766 through the Vale of Glencoe, she "recollected many passages" of Ossian "in the very places that inspired them."[4] Receptive of knowledge and moderate in expression, she will prove, as a critic, prudent and sensible, rather than original.

II

Her *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare*, published in 1769, was meant as an answer to Voltaire's strictures on the great dramatist. It is therefore related to French and English Shakespearian criticism in the eighteenth century, and, in order to assign to the work its just place and value,

[1] *Letters*, iii., 69, alluding perhaps to ALLAN RAMSAY'S *Scots Songs* (1719), and to the *Tea-Table Miscellany* and *Evergreen* of the same (1724).

[2] *Letters*, iv., 61. [3] *Ibid.*, 292.

[4] DORAN, *A Lady of the Last Century*, p. 143.

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a previous sketch of the more general question may not seem unnecessary.[1]

The dominant tendency of English opinion on Shakespeare during the hundred years that followed the Restoration was a spirit of compromise between admiration for poetical beauties so dazzling that they could not be ignored, and blame for offences against moral or critical decorum and propriety. In his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, dated 1668, Dryden, "the father of Shakespearian criticism,"[2] struck the keynote which, till Coleridge's and Hazlitt's time, was echoed in more or less ample modulations of now rapturous and now reproachful tone. Shakespeare, he had already declared,[3] together "with some errors not to be avoided in that age," undoubtedly possessed "a larger soul of poesy than ever any of our nation." The

[1] The following books have been found useful in this study: G. SAINTSBURY, *A History of Criticism*, 1902, ii., 365-495; *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, edited by D. NICHOL SMITH, 1903; J. J. JUSSERAND, *Shakespeare en France*, 1898, p. 145 *sqq.*; T. R. LOUNSBURY, *Shakespeare and Voltaire*, 1902.

[2] D. NICHOL SMITH, Introduction, p. xiii.

[3] In the Epistle Dedicatory of the *Rival Ladies* (1664) (*Essays* of JOHN DRYDEN, selected and edited by W. P. Ker, 1900, i., 6).

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universality and depth of the dramatist's psychological insight struck him with wonder. "He was," Dryden exclaimed, "the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient, poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read Nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike. . . . He is many times flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him."[1] He had "an universal mind, which comprehended all characters and passions"; Fletcher, his most skilful disciple, was only "a limb" of him.[2] But, however warm the critic's appreciation may

[1] *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, ed. Ker, vol. i., pp. 79-80.

[2] *Essays*, ed. Ker, vol. i., p. 228, *Preface to Troilus and Cressida*, containing the grounds of Criticism in Tragedy (1679).

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be, he does not the less insist on the poet's "faults," especially in style. He even goes so far as to assert that the reader "will find in every page either some solecism of speech, or some notorious flaw in sense,"[1] that "in many places," Shakespeare "writes below the dullest writer of ours, or any precedent age," that "the fury of his fancy often transports him beyond the bounds of judgment" into a profusion of metaphors, similes, or "bombasts," which makes him "the very Janus of poets" and precipitates him from the "height of thought to low expressions."[2] In a word, as Dryden's successors will ceaselessly repeat, Shakespeare had an unbounded genius, a "native wood-note wild," but no taste. For "the times were ignorant" in which he lived. "Poetry was then, if not in its infancy among us, at least not arrived to its vigour and maturity,"[3] to that classical correctness and elegance of phrase which Waller initiated and Dryden himself improved.

The poet's enthusiasm, though tempered

[1] *Essays*, ed. Ker, vol. i., p. 165, Defence of the Epilogue to the second part of the *Conquest of Granada* (1672).

[2] *Ibid.*, 172. [3] *Ibid.*, 165.

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by fault-finding, called forth in 1693 a vigorous protest by an uncompromising critic. Thomas Rymer, the compiler of the *Fœdera*, had already recommended in 1674 the example of the Ancients and translated, for the benefit of the unlearned, Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie*. In his Preface, this loud-voiced monitor exclaimed: "How unhappy the greatest English poets have been through their ignorance or negligence of the fundamental Rules and Laws of Aristotle!" Was Shakespeare, the guiltiest of all trespassers, to escape uncensured, because the too indulgent Dryden had pleaded in his favour? Certainly not. Everybody, genius or no genius, must conform to the rules, to the three venerable Unities—of Action, Time, and Place: Rymer, therefore, with great gusto, proceeded to indict and to sentence the culprit. Look at our neighbours' drama, the judge said in his anger! No doubt, "that wild-goose chase of Romance runs still in their head, some scenes of love must everywhere be shuffled in, tho' never so unseasonable"; no doubt, they write their "plays in rime," and "their language itself wants strength and sinews, . . . their

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consonants spread on paper, but stick in the hedge, and pass not their teeth in their pronunciation." Yet, all deductions made, "the French are certainly very delicate and commendable in points of decency. The noble encouragement they met withal, and their singular application have carried them very far in the improvement of the drama." Whilst we, thanks to such playwrights as this Shakespeare, deserve "what Quintilian pronounced concerning the Roman Comedy: In Tragœdia maxime claudicamus, vix levem consequimur umbram," which may be rendered into English, to help your ignorance: "In Tragedy, we come short extreamly; hardly have we a slender shadow of it." As a proof of our inferiority, take a so-called masterpiece, that *Othello* which "is said to bear the bell away" from all other tragic plays. Let us examine it, as a scholarly critic should, from the four points of view of the fable, the characters, the thoughts, and the expression. "The Fable is drawn from a novel, composed in Italian by Giraldi Cinthio. . . . Shakespear alters it from the original in several particulars, but always, unfortunately, for the worse." What a tissue

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of improbabilities he has made of it! "He bestows a name on his Moor, and styles him the Moor of Venice: a note of pre-eminence, which neither History nor Heraldry can allow him. . . . It is an affront to all Chroniclers, and Antiquaries, to top upon 'em a Moor, with that mark of renown, who yet had never faln within the sphere of their Cognisance." Desdemona is no better, complains our unpoetical Rymer, hurt in his historical susceptibility. Here she comes, "dressed up with her Top Knots and raised to be a Senator's daughter. All this is very strange, and therefore pleases such as reflect not on the improbability. Surely," he goes on, in a strain of boorish irony, "the moral of this fable is on a par with the invention of it." Hereby, "all maidens of quality" may be cautioned "how, without their parents' consent, they run away with Blackamoors. Secondly, this may be a warning to all good wives, that they look well to their linnen"—better than Desdemona, who, as everybody knows, lost her handkerchief—"thirdly, this may be a lesson to Husbands, that, before their Jealousie be tragical, the proofs may be mathematical." So much for the fable. The

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characters "are not less unnatural and improper." Has any one ever read of a soldier like Iago? Was Shakespeare unaware that, according to all precedents, ancient and modern, a soldier should be "open-hearted, frank, plain-dealing," "a character constantly worn by them for some thousands of years in the world," and nowise "a close, dissembling, false, insinuating rascal," like this "most intolerable" ensign. Really, "there is not a monkey but understands nature better, not a pug in Barbary that has not a truer taste of things" than this Shakespeare, whom some would "top upon us" for a genius. Such being his characters, we need not expect, of course, his style and thoughts to be "either true or fine or noble. . . . In the neighing of an horse or in the growling of a mastiff, there is a meaning, there is as lively expression, and, may I say, more humanity than many times in the tragical flights of Shakespear." His "genius lay for comedy and humour," for a certain kind of farce that could please "his masters, the coblers and parish clerks, and Old Testament stroulers." In Tragedy, the man who could put heroes like Brutus

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and Cassius in "Fools' Coats and make them Jack-puddens" was "quite out of his element." With him we live in a "land of savages amongst Blackamoors," uncivilised by the precious "Rules" that Aristotle inculcated.[1]

That this conceited pedant should have been taken seriously may seem surprising, but it is a fact that his virulent attacks on Shakespeare[2] and his scolding advocacy of the Rules enforced Dryden's submission, who, in the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, quoted with approval Rapin's recommendation of Aristotle's precepts as a means of reducing "Nature into method," accepted the Stagyrite's definition of tragedy as a sufficient reason for condemning "all Shakespeare's historical plays," and pliantly admitted that "Mr Rymer had discovered in his criticisms how defective Shakespeare and Fletcher have been in their plots."[3] A later writer, the notorious John Dennis, whom Mr Nichol Smith has treated with excessive indulg-

[1] *A Short View of Tragedy*, ed. 1693, pp. 61-4, 86-6, 148, 159.

[2] Not only in the *Short View*, but also in *The Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd* (1678).

[3] *Essays*, ed. Ker, i., 207, 228-9 (1679).

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ence,[1] followed in the pedagogue's footsteps. In his three *Letters on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare*, published in 1711, he acknowledged indeed that the Elizabethan dramatist "was one of the greatest genius's that the world e'er saw for the tragick stage," that his beauties were all "his own, and owing to the force of his own nature, whereas his faults were owing to his education, and to the age that he lived in." But, this passing tribute once paid, the objections crowded under Dennis's pen. Shakespeare, he thought, had wanted "nothing but time and leisure to have found out" the Rules and to have read "the Græcian and Roman Authors." "What would he not have

[1] *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, Introduction, p. xvii. DENNIS'S earlier *Impartial Critick*, or *Observations on Mr Rymer's Short View* . . . (1693), is a very lame defence of Shakespeare, as the anonymous author of *Reflections on Mr Rymer's Short View* (1694), Charles Gildon perhaps, very justly remarked. Of Rymer himself, the writer observed that "Tho' 'tis frequent enough to meet with a dull poetaster for a poet, yet 'tis something more rare to encounter a jolly droll for a critic." In 1718 Gildon published *The Complete Art of Poetry in Six Parts*, composed in dialogue form, where one of the interlocutors, Laudon, advocates the rules; but the book contains an excellent choice of extracts from Shakespeare.

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been," the critic exclaimed, "if he had joined to so happy a genius Learning and the Poetical Art!" Then he would not have introduced into his tragedies "things which are against the dignity of that noble poem, as the rabble in *Julius Cæsar* and that in *Coriolanus*"; he would not have so familiarly debased the greatest heroes of antiquity, turned Menenius into "a downright buffoon," an inconceivable "Ciceronian Jack-pudding," and made Cæsar "but a fourth-rate actor in his own tragedy." No; enlightened and stimulated by "the Poetical Art," he would have shown us Cæsar consulting with Cicero and Antony on the advisability of abdicating or retaining the "absolute supremacy," and thus we might have had "a scene something like that which Corneille has so happily us'd in his *Cinna*."[1] But such a masterpiece, the fruit of Dennis's profound cogitations, was too plainly beyond the reach of a Modern untutored in antique lore! Fortunately, however, Shakespeare had, some years before, found a better apologist than Dennis. In *A Discourse upon Comedy*,[2]

[1] *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, pp. 24-6, 31, 33-4, 37.

[2] Published in 1702.

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Farquhar had answered both Collier[1] and Rymer. "Aristotle," he bluntly declared, "was no poet, and consequently not capable of giving instructions in the Art of Poetry." The rules were nothing but a set of "accidental observations drawn from the works of Homer and Euripides," no essential principles. They had no value in practice or in theory. They could neither ensure success nor be justified in reason. "That a thousand years should come within the compass of three hours is no more an impossibility than that two minutes should be contained in one." Addressing, with real Irish warmth, an imaginary objector, he anticipated Johnson's famous argument, when he exclaimed: "Were not you the very minute before in the pit, talking to a wench, and now, præsto, pass, you are spirited away to the banks of the river Nile. Surely this is a most intolerable improbability. Then in the second act, with a flourish of the fiddles, I change the scene to Astrachan—" "O, this is intolerable"—"Look'ee, sir, 'tis

[1] Whose *Short View* appeared in 1698. Collier's opinion on Shakespeare is that "where there is most smut, there is least sense."

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not a jot more intolerable than the other; for you'll find that 'tis much about the same distance between Ægypt and Astrachan as it is between Drury Lane and Grand Cairo." Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher, and others were not inferior, but different from, the Ancients. The "great Shakespear," in particular, is not a writer "whom every little fellow that can form an Aoristus Primus will presume to condemn for Indecorums and Absurdities." Compared with Aristotle, he surely is "the greater poet of the two," and, if you say "it must be so, because Aristotle said it, I say it must be otherwise, because Shakespear said it."[1] A most generous and triumphant defence indeed, by a brother playwright!

Henceforward, Rymer's influence decreased,[2] and most Shakespearian critics

[1] "Discourse upon Comedy," *Works*, ed. 1728, i., 93, 98, 103-4.

[2] It may still be felt, perhaps, in SHAFTESBURY'S judgment (*Characteristics*, ed. 1711, i., Advice to an Author, 275:) "Our old dramatick poet may witness for our good ear and manly relish, notwithstanding his natural rudeness, his unpolish'd stile, his antiquated phrase and wit, his want of method and coherence, and his deficiency in almost all the graces and ornaments of this kind of writing"—though Shaftesbury does not

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sided with Dryden in his more favourable judgment on the dramatist. Nicholas Rowe's preface to his edition of Shakespeare, published in 1709, contained not only the best life of the poet that the eighteenth century produced, but also a very sympathetic appreciation. He disapproved of Rymer's severity: "I must confess," he said, "I can't very well see what could be the reason of his animadverting with so much sharpness upon the faults of a man excellent on most occasions. . . . Finding fault is certainly the easiest task of knowledge," an "ungrateful province" to be left to the "tyranny of pedants." True criticism is not a search after defects, but after beauties. Shakespeare, as the most original of all writers, independent of the Ancients, unbeholden to any one, except for the "foundation of the tale," does not fall under the jurisdiction of

deny him some qualities.—HUME (1754) is still more severe. In his *History of England* (ed. Hughes, 1854, v., 54-5), he speaks of Shakespeare's "many irregularities, and even absurdities," of "his total ignorance of all theatrical art and conduct." This is hardly a poet to be represented as "capable of furnishing a proper entertainment to a refined or intelligent audience," says the fastidious sceptic, David Hume.

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Aristotle and the rules. He "lived under a kind of mere light of nature, and had never been made acquainted with the regularity of those written precepts; so it would be hard to judge him by a law he knew nothing of." Such strictures as those of Rymer are therefore irrelevant. They must give place to an enumeration of excellences. "There is a great deal of entertainment in Shakespeare's comical humours": Falstaff, for instance, a "lewd old fellow," a liar, a thief, a vainglorious coward, has been endowed with "so much wit as to make him almost too agreeable," "Shylock the Jew in the *Merchant of Venice*" is an "incomparable character," and "the play itself one of the most finished of any of Shakespear's." The *Tempest* seems to Rowe "as perfect in its kind as almost anything we have of his," and Caliban, a character so well-sustained in its extravagance, "shows a wonderful invention in the author." "The whole tragedy of *Macbeth*, but more especially the scene where the king is murdered in the second act," as well as *Hamlet*, "is a noble proof of that manly spirit with which he writ." And what strength of expression he was gifted with, as Dryden had already

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remarked! "His images are indeed everywhere so lively, that the thing he would represent stands full before you, and you possess every part of it." No doubt, he was not free from faults: his plots lack originality and cohesion; he fell into "the way of tragi-comedy," that "common mistake" of his age, too agreeable indeed at all times "to the English taste"; he occasionally jingled and played upon words, thus complying with "the common vice of the age he lived in," when such quibbles were used as ornaments "to the sermons of some of the gravest divines."[1] In short, Shakespeare, according to Rowe, had some defects, which he could not avoid, and many incomparable beauties, which none but he ever possessed.

Pope's estimate[2] seems to us more jejune and less appreciative. Shakespeare's works he considers as a compound of good and bad, affording, he thinks, "the most numerous as well as most conspicuous instances both of beauties and faults of all sorts." As an original writer, the great dramatist stands

[1] *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, pp. 9-15, 19-20.

[2] *Ibid.*, Preface to his Edition of Shakespeare (1725), pp. 47-51.

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above par, even above Homer: "he is not so much an imitator as an instrument of nature"; his characters it would be "an injury" to call mere copies: each of them is as much an individual as those in life itself. He has an absolute command over the passions; he moves our laughter and tears whenever and just when he pleases; his sentiments and moral reflections obtain our admiration; "by a talent very peculiar, something between penetration and felicity, he hits upon that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns." "He seems to have known the world by intuition," says Pope after Dryden. But perfection did not belong to him. Side by side with "these great excellences" are to be found "defects almost as great." He was, like most Elizabethan playwrights, dependent on the populace for his livelihood: he must please his audience of "tradesmen and mechanicks" by showing them their own image, even in *Coriolanus* and in *Julius Cæsar;* he must obey the players, judges as fit "of what is right as taylors are of what is graceful." Thus bound and limited by the necessities of his profession, Shakespeare could not be faultless; still less

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could he imitate the Ancients. To judge him, therefore, "by Aristotle's rules is like trying a man by the laws of one country, who acted under those of another." Meagre in thought, Pope's criticism sounds as an echo of Dryden's. It is far inferior to Rowe's; it cannot for a moment rival Johnson's Preface to the 1765 edition of Shakespeare, a production as weighty in matter as in style. At that time, owing, as we shall see, to Voltaire's attacks on the English drama, Shakespearian criticism had taken a larger scope: the merits or demerits of the poet could no longer be enquired into without a reference to wider questions. With his characteristic fearlessness in discussing purely intellectual themes, Johnson goes to the root of the difficulty and solves the problem once for all. He begins by praising in his turn Shakespeare's matchless skill as a painter of "manners and of life." His personages are as "distinct" as Pope and Rowe have asserted them to be; but they possess a still greater value in Johnson's eyes as "representations of general nature," as "species" in which mankind will ever see themselves reflected. Because Shakespeare "is above

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all writers the poet of nature," he has reproduced, in his living figures, not only the peculiar and ephemeral features of individuals, but also the more permanent characteristics of the race. Ignorant of theatrical decorum, such as Greece and France understood and practised it, he has given us in his plays a complete view of life, mixing "the comic and tragic scenes" as they are mixed in reality. He has exhibited the true "state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, in which at the same time the reveller is hasting to his wine and the mourner burying his friend." Shakespeare's very want of "art" results in a nearer approximation to truth, and his plays lose none of their effect thereby. Neither does our past laughter stop our tears when the time comes for weeping, nor do the tears we have shed spoil our enjoyment of laughter when it returns. "The interchanges of mingled scenes seldom fail to produce the intended vicissitudes of passion." Is it not delightful to see Johnson, by a simple appeal to truth and nature, overturning the ponderous theories of pedants? Equally decisive is his answer to Voltaire and Rymer on the question

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of the rules. You will grant me, he tells them, that, except in "his histories," which, "being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws," Shakespeare "has well enough preserved the unity of action." But to those "of time and place he has shown no regard." Therefore you say that his drama is not "credible." What is performed in three hours, you maintain, cannot have lasted "months or years," what is acted on one stage cannot have taken place in different countries. But the unities are not founded in reason, whatever their antiquity and authority may be. "It is false that any representation is mistaken for reality." "When the play opens," *Antony and Cleopatra*, for instance, does the spectator really "imagine himself at Alexandria"? does he believe "that his walk to the theatre has been a voyage to Egypt"? If a London stage stands for Alexandria, why should it not stand for Rome also? "Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitations," nay, "the delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no

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more." Since we allow so many impossibilities as regards the place, we may extend at will the time of the action, the more so as the greater part of it "elapses between the acts." But Johnson would have been too far in advance of his age if, after so conclusive a defence, he had not repeated the traditional objections against Shakespeare's drama: the looseness of his plots, the inequalities of his style, pompous in his narratives, low in his "contests of sarcasm," the inaccuracies of his chronology, and lastly, what seems to be Johnson's own remark, the want of "moral purpose" in his compositions, intended not to instruct, but to please. That a man who, in the beginning of his essay, had described Shakespeare as the "poet of life," whose works are as indissoluble as "adamant," should conclude by saying that "not one play perhaps," if exhibited as the production of a contemporary writer, would be heard to the end, leaves a painful impression on us. But we must bear in mind Rowe's advice, and, like him, forgetting the defects, remember only the beauties. Then Johnson's appreciation of Shakespeare, in spite of an occasional dash of prejudice, will

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appear as the most vigorous, thorough-going, principle-revealing work of criticism that the eighteenth century bequeathed to us on the subject.[1]

That gradual emancipation of the critical mind from the narrow dogmas of the past, successfully carried out in England from Dryden's to Johnson's time, did not take place in France until the Revolution and Empire were well over. It was retarded, not only by those political convulsions, but also by a smaller cause: the conservative influence of Voltaire, whose uncompromising scepticism in matters religious and

[1] Cf. *Eighteenth Century Essays*, pp. 114-5, 121-2, 117-20, 126-9, 123-5, 141. A full list of minor Shakespearian critics between Dennis's and Johnson's times is given in the same work, pp. xvii.-xxi. and p. 332, n. 126. After Johnson's Preface, the most remarkable contribution to Shakespearian scholarship was RICHARD FARMER'S *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare*, an entirely new departure, a mine of suggestive bibliographical knowledge on Elizabethan literature. There, Farmer proved, in the most circumstantial manner, that Shakespeare had not read the Ancients, Plutarch for instance, in the text, but in contemporary translations. With MORGANN'S *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777), brilliantly written in places, but too paradoxical as a whole, began the detailed study of Shakespeare's personages, which led to Hazlitt's well-known lectures later on.

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philosophical never extended, as is well known, to things dramatic. There he remained the most bigoted of orthodox believers. During his three years' stay in England,[1] he had indeed been struck by the power of some of Shakespeare's plays, of *Julius Cæsar* above all; he had come to the conclusion that our French tragedies were too often frigid and declamatory, and that an increase of rapidity in the action and of variety in the incidents would be desirable. In consequence he condescended to borrow many useful suggestions from Shakespeare, — and he most ungratefully abstained from acknowledging his debt. He stole from *Othello* the plot of his *Zaïre*; he copied in *Mahomet* some of the most tragic scenes in *Macbeth*; the "spectres" in *Eriphyle* and in *Sémiramis* stalked over the stage in imitation of the ghost in *Hamlet*. But his lifelong abuse of Shakespeare showed him to be a belated disciple of Rymer, whom he quoted with delight. His superstitious reverence for the "poetical art," for theatrical decorum and for the unities, was as strong as Dennis's. The

[1] From 1726 till 1729.

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rules he considered as the "fundamental" principles of dramatic composition, as wholesome chains which none but the weak would refuse to bear. No exception could be allowed even in favour of the greatest genius. His condemnation of Shakespeare's "wild extravagance" never varied: it only increased in virulence as time went on. When most enthusiastic about England, he wrote in his *Lettres philosophiques*[1] that "Shakespeare, the creator of the English drama, had a vigorous and teeming genius, natural sometimes and sometimes sublime, but without the smallest spark of taste, and without the least knowledge of the rules. This writer's merits," he added, "have ruined the English stage; the fine scenes, the many grand and terrible passages scattered through his monstrous farces miscalled tragedies, have insured his success" and called forth imitations. Yet, "in the *Moor of Venice*, a very touching play, you see a man strangling his wife before the audience, and, when the poor woman has been strangled, she cries out that she is very unjustly murdered. . . . In *Hamlet*, grave-

[1] Letter xviii., "on Tragedy." The book was published in 1733 in England, and in 1734 in France.

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diggers at work drink, sing catches and jest about the dead men's skulls they find with such wit as may be expected from people of that class." Not the slightest sense of propriety in those rude compositions: kings jostle hinds, talk like mechanics and get drunk; not the slightest "regularity": a hero, baptized in the first act, dies an old man in the fifth. How is the admiration of an enlightened English public to be explained, then? They cannot be entirely mistaken in their taste; they cannot be "quite wrong in their pleasures." The reason of their enthusiasm, says Voltaire, seems to be that, however conspicuous the defects of their favourite author, his beauties are still more so, "like the lightning through the darkest night."[1]

So long as his opinion prevailed in Paris, Voltaire, proud of having introduced Shakespeare to the French readers of his *Lettres philosophiques*, kept his patronising tone and treated his *protégé* as an amiable barbarian whose untaught energy, provided it were directed and tamed down, might

[1] *Essai sur la Poésie épique*, first printed 1728, but the passage here quoted is a later addition.

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help to invigorate our own tragedy. He could not disapprove of Louis Riccoboni's observation[1] that, "if, one day, the English poets consented to obey the rules and to remove from the sight of their audiences blood and murder, they might aspire to a share at least of the glory due to the best productions of the modern stage." The judgment passed on Shakespeare by the Abbé Le Blanc[2] coincided so fully with his own, that he could endorse every word

[1] See RICCOBONI'S *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les différens théâtres de l'Europe*, 1738, pp. 150-78, Le Théâtre anglois. Another observation of this writer made its mark at the time. To explain why so many deaths and murders are presented to the spectators on the London stage, he suggested that the English, being a very thoughtful people, must be shaken out of their musings by sights of horror: "Suivant mon raisonnement je crois que si l'on donnoit sur leur théâtre des tragédies dans le goût des meilleures et des plus exactes, c'est-à-dire de celles qui sont dénuées de ces horreurs qui souillent la scène par le sang, les spectateurs s'endormiroient peut-être. L'expérience que les premiers poëtes dramatiques auront faite de cette vérité les aura portés à établir ce genre de tragédie, pour les faire sortir de leur rêverie par des grands coups qui les réveillent" (p. 166).

[2] *Lettres d'un François*, ed. 1758, t. ii., pp. 94-5, 410, 413. On p. 418 he says that "a Tragedy should be a poem fit for kings, and not, as in England, fit for the people."

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of it: "Complete translations of, or faithful extracts from, Shakespeare's best plays would do much harm to his reputation in France. . . . He falls so often into the low and puerile!" The pleasure that some detached passages might procure us would be so entirely spoilt, were we to read any one of his dramas from beginning to end! His admirable genius forms so perpetual a contrast with his bad taste! For he knew not how to choose; he forgot that tragedy cannot admit what is vulgar and familiar in Nature. "Few of his works remain in which three-fourths of the whole are not to be rejected. Compared with M. de Crébillon's *Electra*, how far removed is his *Hamlet* from such a degree of perfection!"

In 1746, however, a sudden[1] change took

[1] The very favourable article on Shakespeare published in PRÉVOST'S *Pour et Contre*, t. xiv., 1738, pp. 25-48, has not the importance that M. JUSSERAND (*Shakespeare en France*, p. 173) ascribes to it. For it is not an original production, but a mere translation of ROWE'S *Preface* (cf. p. 28 especially). More striking still is a paper on *Othello*, in the same Journal and presumably by the same writer (pp. 49-72), which concludes by the following judgment on the play:

"Cette étrange rapsodie, où l'on n'apperçoit ni ordre ni vraisemblance, et où le comique et le tragique sont

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place. M. de la Place, a former pupil of the English Jesuits at St Omer,[1] undertook to give to the French public numerous specimens of those strange plays, either in free translations, or in condensed analyses. The first four volumes of his *Théâtre anglois*, published in the same year, were appropriated to Shakespeare; his opening "Discourse," though it was not all praise, though it particularly reproved the mixture of comic and tragic scenes, deprecated, however, any "rash and inflexible condemnation of what posterity would perhaps commend." Here, then, was an officious person so partial to Shakespeare as not to translate him literally, for fear his coarseness should offend his readers, and so unkind to Voltaire as to reveal to all eyes the true original of so many admired dramatic innovations! This seemed intolerable to the great man, who vented his resentment in the famous Preface to *Sémiramis*.[2] Shakespeare, that barbarian

confusément mêlés, passe pour le chef-d'œuvre de Shakespear. On ne m'en croiroit pas, si je ne promettois d'expliquer dans quelque autre feuille les causes de cette admiration."

[1] Cf. LA HARPE'S *Lycée*, t. xiv., pp. 323-7.

[2] In 1748.

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of genius, now became an "intoxicated savage," whose delirious imagination produced such a tragedy as *Hamlet*, "so low and extravagant that the vilest populace in France or Italy could never bear it." Thirteen years later, incensed more and more by the continued success of La Place's work, by Patu's[1] enthusiasm for *Romeo and*

[1] Claude-Pierre Patu, avocat en Parlement, was born in October 1729, and died of lung disease on 20th August 1757 (cf. an Obituary Notice in the *Année Littéraire*, 1757, t. vii., pp. 178-187). His comedietta les *Adieux du goût* met with some success in 1754, and in the same year he visited England, where he made the acquaintance of Garrick, whose ardent admirer he became. More than any Frenchman of the time, certainly more than La Place, he felt the charm of Shakespeare as a poet (cf. his Letters to Garrick, in GARRICK'S *Private and Foreign Correspondence*, ed. 1832, ii., 383-420; the first is written in English, and dated "Paris, 25th February 1755"). Some extracts from this Correspondence will show the young critic's sincere enthusiasm. On 6th May 1755, he says:

"Je lis Shakespeare avec mon ami Mr Flint (a teacher of English in Paris), et le livre nous tombe des mains à chaque page. Quelle chaleur d'action! quelle vérité de portraits! quelle variété dans les descriptions! Quelle foule de préceptes instructifs, de remarques sages, de beautés de toute espèce! Quelle connaissance du cœur et de la nature! Je travaille maintenant à un ouvrage sur votre littérature, qui me donnera lieu de m'expliquer sur ce génie merveilleux."

This was to be a History of English Poetry, beginning

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Juliet both at Ferney and in the *Journal Etranger*, by the publication, in the *Journal*

with Chaucer (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 406). On the 18th of June, he wrote:

"J'ai mille choses à dire, sans préjugés, ce me semble, sans mauvaise humeur, sans partialité nationale, sur cette divine action, sur cette chaleur d'intérêt qui caractérise tant de vos pièces, et qui les rendent sur la scène si préférables aux nôtres, dont la plupart ne sont que de très belles élégies et de charmants poëmes; mais je suis encore bien jeune, et j'ai besoin de certaines lumières que je saisirai mieux à Londres qu'ici. Je crois donc devoir remettre ce grand coup à quelques années, et me contenter en attendant de porter quelques bottes à cet amour tyrannique que nous inspirent par prescription les règles d'unités, et surtout à cette idée modeste, où sont nos gens, qu'au théâtre comme en tout nous sommes les arbitres souverains. Heureux si ma santé, qui continue à être assez chancelante, ne me faisait craindre l'hiver de votre ville, et si les brouillards de la Tamise et la fumée de charbon convenaient autant à ma poitrine que les hommes, leurs mœurs, et les pièces tragiques s'y accordent avec mon goût."

In October 1755 he spent a week with Voltaire, whom he tried to bring to his own views on Shakespeare by reading aloud some scenes of *Romeo* and of *Macbeth*:

"Je n'ai pas manqué de lui dire ce que je pensais de ses expressions si fausses, si peu réfléchies au sujet de Shakespear. Il est convenu de bonne foi que c'était *un barbare aimable, un fou séduisant*; ce sont ses propres termes: le grand article qui le met de mauvaise humeur est l'irrégularité des plans de cet illustre poëte. . . . J'ai fait ressouvenir aujourd'hui même ce grand homme du trait sublime de Macduff: 'He has no children,' de la scène entre le jeune Arthur et son gouverneur Hubert, et de bien d'autres beautés de l'inimitable Shakespear. Je ne doute presque pas que je ne l'amenasse à ma façon de penser à ce sujet, si j'avais le temps de faire à Genève

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Encyclopédique,[1] of two laudatory articles on Shakespeare and Otway compared with Corneille and Racine, he rose in his anger, and addressed "to all the nations of Europe" an *Appeal* against these erroneous judgments. As was his wont, he ridiculed *Hamlet* in a lengthy account of the play, quoted, for the third time perhaps, some objectionable passages in Othello, and concluded by asking: "Who can now speak of Aristotle's rules, of the three unities, of decorum, of the necessity there is of never leaving the stage empty, of giving a plausible reason for all exits and entrances, of making princes speak with due propriety? It is too plain that an author can bewitch a nation without

un séjour plus long, mais je quitte le dieu de notre littérature après-demain, et je reviens à Paris." (*Ibid.*, pp. 408-9).

The article on Mrs LENNOX'S *Shakespear Illustrated* in the *Journal Etranger* for December 1755, i., 29-90, is by Patu (cf. GARRICK'S *Correspondence*, ii., 405). He died at St Jean de Maurienne, on his return from Italy, whither the care of his health had driven him. There is no doubt that French criticism on English poetry lost much by his premature death.

[1] Contrary to Mr LOUNSBURY'S opinion (*Shakespeare and Voltaire*, p. 183), we believe these articles to be *bonâ fide* translations. They appeared in the numbers for 15th October and 1st November 1760.

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putting himself to so much trouble."[1] And the better to expose the errors of his personal enemies, the Shakespeare-worshippers, he took occasion of the *Commentary* he was writing on Corneille[2] to translate as faithfully as possible—at least so he said—the first three acts of *Julius Cæsar*, containing the dramatic presentment of a conspiracy very similar to that in Cinna. Between Corneille in the text, and Shakespeare rendered into French prose and blank verse by Voltaire, the world would thus be enabled to decide.

III

Mrs Montagu, like most of her compatriots, felt indignant at this abuse. She had always admired Shakespeare sincerely. Comparing him with Sophocles in 1760, she wrote that "he alone, like the dervise in the Arabian tales, could throw his soul into the body of another man." His gifts as a

[1] VOLTAIRE, *Œuvres complètes*, Garnier ed., 1879, xxiv., 203.

[2] In 1764.

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character-painter seemed to her unparalleled. Not so his style: "Had Shakespeare lived in Sophocles' age and country, what a writer had he been! what powers had he by nature, and alas! what deficiencies in art!" Here the keynote is struck again that characterises, as we have seen, English criticism on Shakespeare at that time: so many beauties to be reckoned on one side, so many defects to be deducted on the other, with an overwhelming balance in favour of the former. He possesses the dramatist's essential skill, that of creating living individual figures, as if by intuition: "In his *Hamlet*, *King John*, *Henry IV.*, and in all his good plays, he makes his persons say what one would imagine could not occur to any one who was not in their very circumstances." His being an actor "might a little assist him in this respect," for a writer "puts down what he imagines," an actor "what he feels." His dramatic instinct unerringly guided him, even in his "moral reflections." They "are not the cold and formal observations of a spectator, but come warm from the heart of the interested person."[1] Answer-

[1] *Letters*, iv., 299-301.

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ing this letter, Lord Lyttelton applauded his friend's remarks: "Shakespeare," he declared in his turn, was "indeed unequalled in the power of painting Nature as she is," and of putting into the mouth of the "interested persons" moral reflections which the passion they breathe makes much more striking and effective than the descant of a Greek chorus.[1] Thus confirmed in her high appreciation of Shakespeare, Mrs Montagu's antipathy to Voltaire could not but increase. It became a rooted aversion. She disliked not only his criticism, but his conduct, his principles, his works. The *Henriade* she thought a schoolboy's imitation of Homer and Virgil, a "light matter borne aloft by the puffing of a little rhyme," fit "to dance a while in the atmosphere of France"[2]; *Candide or Optimism* she agreed with Mrs Carter in "detesting." "This creature," exclaimed our pious Englishwomen in concert, "is a downright rebel to his God."[3] And as such a hideous infidel must be severely castigated, they started, one day, in Amazonian fashion,

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 206.
[2] *Letters*, iv., 67 (1757).
[3] *Ibid.*, 197.

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from London to Welwyn, where that solemn champion of Christianity, Dr Young, still resided, and, without much difficulty, persuaded him to insert in his *Resignation* a homily, half unctuous and half minatory, on the error of a philosopher's ways.[1] Common honesty, Mrs Montagu evidently believed, was not to be expected from a member of "Satan's household"; ingratitude to a benefactor, to Shakespeare, must be one of the smallest sins of such a miscreant. Therefore, she was not surprised, when "the saucy Frenchman," in his Preface to the *Orphelin de la Chine*,[2] opprobriously called

[1] Cf. *Resignation*, part ii., and Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 257 (2nd September 1761).

[2] Patu himself was displeased. On 23rd September 1755, he wrote to Garrick (*Correspondence*, pp. 404-5):

"*L'Orphelin de la Chine* is over. La maladie subite de Le Kain a interrompu la pièce à la neuvième représentation. . . . La préface ne manquera pas de vous révolter. J'ai peu vu de choses (de lui surtout) aussi mal digérées, je dirais presque aussi mal écrites. Il y traite les pièces de Shakespear de farces monstrueuses, et en parle avec un mépris souverain. J'en suis d'autant plus indigné que les moindres paroles de ce grand écrivain sont prises ici pour des oracles. . . ."

ARTHUR MURPHY appended to his adaptation of the *Orphan of China* (1759) a Letter to M. de Voltaire (2nd ed., pp. 89-96), in which he said:

"A very ingenious gentleman of my acquaintance tells

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Shakespeare's tragedies "monstrous farces." But her anger rose to the threatening pitch: "I could burn him and his tragedy!" she cried. "Foolish coxcomb! rules can no more make a poet than receipts a cook. There must be taste, there must be skill. Oh! that we were as sure our fleets and armies could drive the French out of America,[1] as that our poets and tragedians can drive them out of Parnassus. I hate to see these tame creatures, taught to pace by art, attack fancy's sweetest child!"

What were their tragedies, which Voltaire and all their critics so proudly boasted of? Mere declamations, devoid of life and action. "I am flattered to find my opinion of Corneille has always agreed with yours," she told Mrs Carter so early as 1758.[2] "I will allow he is a poet, but I deny his dramatic talents: he does not possess the familiarity of dialogue, nor the art of realising characters." His

me, that whenever you treat the English bard as a drunken savage in your *avant propos*, he always deems it a sure prognostic that your play is the better for him,"

which sarcastic—but just—observation was literally translated in the *Journal Etranger* for January 1760 (pp. 1-47).

[1] *Letters*, iv., 7-8 (18th November 1755).

[2] *Letters*, iv., 107-8.

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magnanimous, grandiloquent personages resemble the statues of certain great Romans: "their air, their shape, their features are expressed, but they are not animated; they are not men, they are mere images." In a tour she made through Scotland during the autumn of 1766, she became personally acquainted with Henry Home, Lord Kames, whose voluminous and once famous treatise on the *Elements of Criticism* she had probably perused on its publication in 1761. Both the Scotch judge and the English lady were unanimous in their depreciation of Voltaire,[1] and of the French drama. To prove Shakespeare's immense superiority as a painter of the passions, Home also had compared him with Corneille. Truth compelled him to acknowledge, not very unwillingly, we suspect, that the "French author describes in the style of a spectator, instead of expressing passion like one who feels it. . . . In the tragedy of *Cinna*, Æmilia, after the conspiracy is discovered, receives a pardon from Augustus. . . . This is a lucky situation for

[1] Kames had found fault with the *Henriade* in his *Elements*, and drew on himself Voltaire's reprisals in the *Gazette Littéraire* (4th April 1764).

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representing the passions of surprise and gratitude in their different stages, which seem naturally to be what follow." Let us give one instance of those psychological observations on which Kames founded his code of æsthetics: "These passions, raised at once to the utmost pitch" in Æmilia's bosom, "and being at first too big for utterance, must, for some moments, be expressed by violent gestures only: as soon as there is vent for words, the first expressions are broken and interrupted; at last we ought to expect a tide of intermingled sentiments, occasioned by the fluctuation of the mind between the two passions." Unfortunately, however, Corneille had not studied moral philosophy in Scotland. He knew indeed how difficult it is for a tragic poet to paint "extreme grief" by "violent gestures" and "exclamations only."[1] To this powerful objection of Corneille's, Kames had nothing to answer. He preferred criticising on: "Æmilia," he insisted, speaks in the most unnatural manner; "with extreme coolness she describes her own situation as if she

[1] See his *Examen of the Cid*, quoted by Kames himself, *Elements of Criticism*, 6th ed., 1785, i., 480.

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were merely a spectator; . . . in the tragedy of *Sertorius*, the Queen,[1] surprised with the news that her lover was assassinated, instead of venting her passion, undertakes to instruct the bystanders how a queen ought to behave on such an occasion." Even in the *Cid*, Don Diègue, "having been affronted in a cruel manner, expresses scarce any sentiment of revenge, but is totally occupied in contemplating the low situation to which he is reduced." Shakespeare, on the contrary, never "disgusts his reader with general declamation and unmeaning words: his sentiments are adjusted to the peculiar character and circumstances of the speaker, and the propriety is no less perfect between his sentiments and his diction."[2] Kames's conclusions, identical with her own, must have greatly encouraged Mrs Montagu to proceed with her critical work.

In 1764 the first draught of the *Essay on Shakespear* was, in all probability, already

[1] Viriate.

[2] *Elements*, i., 458-64, 500-1. On Mrs Montagu's intercourse with Kames, see his *Memoirs*, by Alexander FRASER TYTLER of Woodhouselee, 2nd ed., 1814, ii., 44 *sqq*.

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written, as Mrs Carter mentions in a letter[1] one of its parts, the "criticism on *Macbeth*." Two years afterwards the same correspondent returned to the subject. She had read "the Prefaces prefixed to Johnson's Shakespear," and, in her opinion, the ablest of them all was Johnson's own. She did not intend, however, "by this to express that he is always right in what he says of his author. In this article he, like the rest of the commentators, appears to be very defective, and consequently 'res integra tibi reservatur,' if you pursue your scheme."[2] On 21st August 1767, Mrs Montagu submitted to her friend another part of her book, the essay "on the Præternatural Beings,"[3] and she probably completed the whole during the summer of 1768.[4] The volume came out anonymously in the following April.

Besides the "Introduction" and the two essays already mentioned "on Macbeth" and

[1] Mrs CARTER'S *Letters to Mrs Montagu*, i., 214 (12th May).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 311 (12th July 1766).

[3] *Ibid.*, 343; cf. *Essay on Shakespear*, p. 140, ed. 1777.

[4] *Ibid.*, 387 (21st June).

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"on the Præternatural Beings," it contains six separate dissertations: on "Dramatic Poetry" in general, on the "Historical Drama," on the two parts of "Henry IV.," on "Corneille's Cinna," and "Shakespear's Julius Cæsar." The mere enumeration of the contents makes the writer's aim manifest: "the genius of Shakespear, through the whole extent of the poet's province,"[1] is one of the two objects of the enquiry, the other being a reply to Voltaire: "I will own," Mrs Montagu says, "I was incited to this undertaking by great admiration of Shakespear's genius, and still greater indignation at the treatment he has received from a French wit, who seems to think he has made prodigious concessions to our prejudices in favour of the works of our countryman, in allowing them the credit of a few splendid passages, while he speaks of every entire piece as a monstrous and ill-constructed farce. Ridiculously has our poet, and ridiculously has our taste been represented by a writer of universal fame, and through the medium of an almost universal language."[2] Mrs

[1] *Essay on Shakespear*, p. 135.
[2] *Ibid.*, 16.

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Montagu's book is, therefore, a patriotic protest against undeserved abuse.

She repudiates Voltaire's chief contention that Shakespeare's ignorance or non-observance of the rules incapacitates him at once from ranking with the greatest classical dramatists—Sophocles, Corneille, and Racine. As Farquhar had done before her, she denies the efficacy of Aristotle's precepts: "When one of these critics has attempted to finish a work by his own rules, he has rarely been able to convey into it one spark of divine fire; and the hero of his piece, whom he designed for a man, remains a cold, inanimate statue. . . . As these pieces take their rise in the school of criticism, they return thither again, and are as good subjects for the students in that art as a dead body to the professors in anatomy."[1] Elsewhere the same position is illustrated by a more elegant simile. According to Mrs Montagu, "the pedant who bought at a great price the lamp of a famous philosopher, expecting that by its assistance his lucubrations would become equally celebrated, was little more absurd than those poets who suppose their dramas

[1] *Essay on Shakespear*, pp. 6-7.

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must be excellent if they are regulated by Aristotle's clock."[1] The rules are not only useless, but also inapplicable to Shakespeare, to one section of his plays especially. Johnson had already asserted that "his histories, being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws."[2] Mrs Montagu, borrowing this idea, expresses it in other words: "Those dramas of Shakespear, which he distinguishes by the name of his histories, being of an original kind and peculiar construction, cannot come within any rules, prior to their existence."[3] Aristotle, whatever his learning, could not legislate about what was not "actually extant" in his own time. His decrees do not cover the whole field of the drama and even in their domain they have no specific virtue.

Voltaire's favourite argument once disposed of, Mrs Montagu proceeds to develop her own critical theory. Remembering that the Ancients and Johnson himself have said that, whilst "the end of writing is to instruct, the

[1] *Essay on Shakespear*, pp. 5-6.
[2] NICHOL SMITH'S *Eighteenth Century Essays*, p. 126.
[3] *Essay on Shakespear*, p. 53.

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end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing,"[1] she starts from the following definition of the drama: "The effecting certain moral purposes, by the representation of a fable, seems to have been the universal intention from the first institution of the drama to this time." She will therefore examine her author with the double view of ascertaining "first, whether his fables answer the noblest end of Fable, moral instruction; next, whether his dramatic imitation has its proper dramatic excellence."[2] A comparison of his and of some other celebrated compositions, where the nature of the subjects can bear it, will enable her to form a candid judgment on his merits.

She entertains no doubts of his ethical superiority over the French tragedians. Mrs Montagu, as we know, looks suspiciously upon love. She finds too much of it in the French plays. Instead of "attempting to purge the passions by Pity and Terror," writers like Corneille and Racine "have plainly neglected" the true object of the drama, its moral end, and melted it away "in

[1] *Eighteenth Century Essays*, p. 119.
[2] *Essay*, pp. 12-3.

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the strains of Elegy and Eclogue." Their warblings may please an effeminate audience, "but let not example," she manfully exclaims, "teach us to fetter the energy and enervate the noble powers of the British Muse and of a language fit to express sublimer sentiments." The subjects of an absolute monarch may delight in making persons "of every age and nation adopt French manners," in turning even Greek heroes into plaintive courtiers. Such distortions of the truth are repugnant to free-born Britons, well-read in Sophocles and Euripides. They know that "Ulysses, in the tragedy of *Hecuba*, coming to demand Polixena to be sacrificed, is cold, prudent, deaf to pity, blind to beauty, and to be moved only by consideration of the public weal." In consequence, they cannot approve of Racine's Ulysses telling Agamemnon "*he is ready to cry*."[1] Surely sentimentalism never was the foible of Penelope's husband. In the

[1] The writer of an article on the *Apologie de Shakespear* in the *Année Littéraire* for 1777, vi., 228, ingeniously remarks about this, that "L'erreur de miladi Montagu est inconcevable. Il faut qu'elle n'ait pas entendu le sens du passage qu'elle cite : en effet, lorsqu' Ulysse dit à Agamemnon qu'il est prêt de pleurer, ce n'est pas qu'il soit attendri sur le sort d'Iphigénie ; c'est une ruse

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same play of *Iphigenia*, Achilles "is not distinguished from any young lover of spirit; yet this is one of the best French tragedies." Nor was Corneille more accurate in his characters. His "strained elevation of sentiment and expression has perhaps a theatrical greatness," but it is not like "Roman dignity," which clothed exalted feelings in simple words. Shakespeare, on the contrary, in the greater number of his historical dramas, takes care to choose national heroes and incidents well-known of all the spectators. Hence a twofold advantage: the interest he excites is deeper, "our noble countryman Percy engages us much more than Achilles"; and in the second place, the moral lesson to be drawn from the play gains in clearness and usefulness: "As the misfortunes of nations, like those of individuals, often arise from their peculiar dispositions, customs, prejudices, and vices, these home-born dramas are excellently calculated to correct them. . . . The Poet collects, as it were, into a focus those truths which lie scattered in the diffuse volume of

éloquente qu'il met en œuvre pour déterminer son père à la sacrifier. Il feint de partager la douleur d'Agamemnon, afin de s'insinuer dans son esprit, et de donner par là plus de poids à ses conseils."

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the historian, and kindles the flame of virtue, while he shows the miseries and calamities of vice." Moreover, taking his work as a whole, we find that it possesses a psychological range and moral utility much wider than those of the French tragedies. These always turn on "love and ambition." "From the first of these passions, many by age and temper are entirely exempted, and from the second many more, by situation. . . . Shakespeare, *in various nature wise*, does not confine himself to any particular passion." For "purgative" power, his plays remain beyond compare. And as a coiner of "sentences," he is "certainly one of the greatest moral philosophers that ever lived." His axioms are not, like those of Euripides, "general opinions collected into maxims, ambitious ornaments glittering alone": they come warm from the speaker's heart, and we remember them the better as they are "naturally united with the story."[1]

If we pass to the second point, to the consideration of the "fable," Shakespeare shows himself no less a master. He unconsciously follows Aristotle's precept that "there can be

[1] *Essay*, pp. 39, 41, 44-6, 55-8, 80.

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no tragedy without action." He is a dramatist "upon instinct," and never deviates into the epic. He seldom or never falls into the long-winded speeches so rife in French plays. Voltaire himself "confesses that some of the most admired tragedies in France are rather conversations than representations of an action." No heavier charge can be brought against them, for, in that case, they "fail in the most essential part of the art." "The business of the drama is to excite sympathy, and its effect on the spectator depends on such a justness of imitation as shall cause, to a certain degree, the same passions and affections, as if what is exhibited was real. We have observed narrative imitation to be too faint and feeble a means to excite passion; declamation, still worse, plays idly on the surface of the subject, and makes the poet, who should be concealed in the action, visible to the spectator."[1] How poor is the merit of overcoming the difficulties of the rules and of the rhyme, when so essential a defect has to be incurred! The real "dramatic art" is then lost sight of, for the sake of an artificial technique.

[1] *Essay*, pp. 30-1.

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As speeches abound in French tragedies, so do characters in Shakespeare's plays. "His talents were universal, his penetrating mind" seemed to know all things by intuition. "He could throw his soul into the body of another man, and be at once possessed of his sentiments," which almost instantaneous inspiration is surely the highest gift in a poet. His grasp and range were such that in his historical dramas he succeeded in painting a full and animated picture of England during the Civil Wars. In his endeavour to reproduce the manifold aspects of things, he broke down, of course, "the barriers that had before confined the dramatic writers to the regions of comedy or tragedy. He perceived the fertility of the subjects that lay between the two extremes; he saw that in the historical play he could represent the manners of the whole people, give the general temper of the times, and bring in view the incidents that affected the common fate of his country." From the extensiveness of the plan doubtless resulted some grave inconveniences: confusion and "hurly-burly" too often prevail in his plays; by his strict fidelity to the chronicles, Shakespeare "has embarrassed

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his dramas with too great a number of persons and events." Moreover, the numberless assassinations and battles he has represented, in conformity with his historical authorities, have caused the French to "impute barbarity and cruelty to a people that could delight in bloody skirmishes on the stage." But how rich is this maze of events in varied and always striking characters! Here is Hotspur, "hurried by an impetuosity of soul out of the sphere of obedience, and, like a comet, though dangerous to the general system, still an object of admiration and wonder to every beholder." What a curious and illuminating contrast he forms with Worcester, the "proud, envious, malignant, artful rebel," with Henry IV. himself, whose "specious talents" assisted him "to usurp a kingdom," but, probably "from the want of great and solid qualities," left him unable to "maintain opinion loyal to the throne." Nor are Prince Hal and Falstaff less skilfully contrived and opposed. "It was a delicate affair to expose the follies of Henry V. before a people proud of his victories, and tender of his fame, at the same time so informed of

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the extravagances and excesses of his youth that he could not appear divested of them with any degree of historical probability. . . . How happily therefore was the character of Falstaff introduced, whose wit and festivity in some measure excuse the Prince for admitting him into his familiarity, and suffering himself to be led by him into some irregularities!" Falstaff's mirth, "the source of his wit," and his overflowing spirits were so irresistibly attractive! The "finesse of wit" was in him, joined to "the drollery of Humour." For "Humour is a kind of grotesque wit, shaped and coloured by the disposition of the person in whom it resides or by the subject to which it is applied." And never was so amusing a "composition" as Falstaff's, whom corpulency, gluttony and cowardice make ridiculous, thereby enhancing, instead of weakening, the effect of his resourceful wit. It may be that, now and then, a secondary figure "appears a mere antiquated habit," a monster begotten by the poet's brain. The rant of Pistol, for instance, is of a strange kind, probably meant as a caricature of some "forgotten mode," of "some fashionable affectation of

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bombast language." The short duration of such oddities has deprived the character of the permanent value which their essential truth imparts to most Shakespearian personages. Take Macbeth, among others, with "his generous disposition and good propensities, but vehement passions, and aspiring wishes." "Amazing is the art with which Shakespeare exhibits the movement of the human mind," gradually "seduced by splendid prospects and ambitious counsels." How well he "renders audible the silent march of thought, traces its modes of operation in the course of deliberating, the pauses of hesitation, and the final decision, shows how Reason checks and how the passions impel; and displays to us the trepidations that precede, and the horrors that pursue acts of blood." See also with what skill Lady Macbeth is made to shrink from killing the king: "the exaggerated fierceness of her character" thus "returns back to the line and limits of humanity, and that very judiciously, by a sudden impression, which has only an instantaneous effect." So "prodigious" was the force of Shakespeare's talents that he could render even his "præternatural beings," his witches and

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ghosts, "credible and subservient to his designs."[1]

It was the height of imprudence in Voltaire to compare *Julius Cæsar* and *Cinna*. For there is not one character in the French play but deserves our contempt. Emilia's "outrageous resentment" against Augustus we cannot sympathise with, as we know nothing of her father, except that he was called Toranius, and had been proscribed by the Triumvirate. Nay, we detest it, for "we see her in the court of Augustus, under the sacred relation of his adopted daughter, enjoying all the privileges of that distinguished situation, and treated with the tenderness of paternal love. Nothing so much deforms the feminine character as ferocity of sentiment. Nothing so deeply stains the human character as ingratitude." Very different from what a Roman hero should have been, Cinna resolves to murder the dictator, in order not so much to free the state as to please his mistress: "Shakespeare most judiciously laboured to show that Brutus's motives to kill Cæsar were perfectly generous, and purely public-

[1] *Essay*, pp. 63-4, 69, 73, 92, 95-6, 103, 108, 124, 164, 178, 185, 203.

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spirited. Corneille has not kindled Cinna to his enterprize with any spark of Roman fire." The feeling he excites in us is "aversion at his black treachery. . . . When Augustus consults him as his friend, whether he shall lay down his power and restore liberty to the Commonwealth, Cinna advises him not to do it, with a great appearance of personal attachment to him and zeal for his country, but in reality that he may not lose a pretence to sacrifice him to the revenge of Emilia. This holds forth Cinna to the spectator as a perfidious friend, a wicked counsellor, a profligate citizen." Maximus, in the third act, turning informer out of love and jealousy, "becomes as base as Cinna his friend and Emilia his mistress." So that the play as a whole, instead of being "the representation of an important event" by illustrious persons, appears as "the love-intrigue of a termagant lady" carried on by "villains."[1]

So far, Mrs Montagu had tried to confute Voltaire by eulogising Shakespeare and depreciating Corneille. She now attacked the French critic directly, and censured the many inaccuracies to be found in his transla-

[1] *Essay*, pp. 219-20, 231, 240.

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tion of the first three acts of *Julius Cæsar*.[1] The blame was just, and Voltaire had courted it by himself challenging comparison with the original text: "The rendering here given of *Cæsar*," he had written in his preface, "is the most faithful ever made in our language from any poet, ancient or foreign. . . . Prose corresponds to prose, blank verse to blank verse, and what is familiar and low in Shakespeare's tragedy has so remained."[2] To this bold assertion, Mrs Montagu opposes a vigorous negative. In the first place, "it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to make the graces of style pass from one language to another, and our blank verse cannot be equalled by French blank verse." Voltaire, moreover, frequently proves, not his knowledge, but his ignorance of the English tongue. "He often mistakes the signification of the most common words, of which there are many remarkable instances in this boasted translation of *Julius Cæsar*." Let us quote at least some of them. In the first scene of the second act, Brutus, loath to have Antony and Cæsar slain together, exclaims: "Our

[1] See above (p. 115).

[2] VOLTAIRE, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. 1877, vii., 435-6.

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course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius," which line was thus translated by Voltaire: "Cette course aux Romains paraîtrait trop sanglante," an "allusion perhaps to the Lupercal course," the ingenious commentator added in a note, unless it signifies "a service of dishes at table."[1] He was corrected by Mrs Montagu, without much difficulty: *course* means "method of proceeding," she very justly observes. Brutus again, conversing with Portia,[2] promises to tell her the secrets of his heart: "All my engagements I will construe to thee," he says; and Voltaire translates: "Va, mes sourcils froncés prennent un air plus doux." A gross blunder! remarks Mrs Montagu. How is it to be explained? With commendable ingenuity, she suggests that "the dictionary was consulted for the word *construe*; . . . according to the usual form, one may suppose it to have stood: to construe = to interpret. This not serving the purpose, to interpret was next sought; there he found: to interpret or to

[1] VOLTAIRE, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 464; cf. *Essay*, pp. 211-2.

[2] *Julius Cæsar*, Act I., Sc. ii., pp. 307-8; cf. VOLTAIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 469, and *Essay*, p. 217.

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explain; again, with indefatigable industry, excited by a desire to excel all translators and translations, he had recourse to the article *to explain*; under this head he found: to unfold or clear up; so away went the translator to clear up the countenance of Brutus." Equally amusing are her strictures on Voltaire's "misconstruction" of Cæsar's haughty speech to Metellus Cimber, whose brother had been banished. Cæsar will not grant the exile's pardon, because such indulgence would turn "preordinance and first decree into the law of children."[1] Voltaire, writing nonsense for the first time perhaps in his life, made the dictator say that "ces basses flatteries

> Peuvent sur un cœur faible avoir quelque pouvoir,
> Et changer quelquefois l'ordre éternel des choses
> Dans l'esprit des enfants!"

Further on, he had rendered,

> "If thou dost bend, and pray, and fawn for him,
> I spurn thee like a cur out of my way,"

by the remarkable blank lines that follow:

> "Flatte, prie à genoux, et lèche-moi les pieds;
> Va, je te rosserai comme un chien; loin d'ici!"

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[1] *Julius Cæsar*, Act III., Sc. i., 37 *sqq.*; cf. VOLTAIRE, p. 480, and *Essay*, pp. 275-8.

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Mrs Montagu's knowledge of French, though she spoke it badly, was finer than Voltaire's sense of English. She knew that "je te rosserai" is "a very low phrase," and that "to spurn is a very noble one, not unfit for the highest poetry or eloquence." Her demonstration was conclusive. The "faithful translator" stood convinced of presumption and ignorance. When, five years later, part of her *Essay* was translated into French, it materially impaired Voltaire's authority as a critic of English literature.

In England, Mrs Montagu's anonymous publication was received with a chorus of praise. Only two dissentient voices made themselves heard. The sarcastic Dowager Countess Gower wrote to Mrs Delany on 30th August that "Mrs Montagu has commenced author in vindication of Shakespear, who *wants none*: therefore her performance must be deemed a work of supererogation; some commend it," she condescendingly added, and "I'll have it, because I can throw it aside when I'm tired."[1] The literary dictator of the time, Dr Johnson, pronounced that

[1] *The Autobiography and Correspondence of* Mrs DELANY, iv., 236-7.

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the *Essay* did its writer honour, but that "it would do nobody else honour." "I will venture to say," he snappishly told Reynolds and Garrick, who defended the work, "that there is not one sentence of true criticism in her book, . . . none showing the beauty of thought, as formed on the workings of the human heart."[1] As to her replying to Voltaire's false accusations, "nobody else had thought it worth while." And so, "what merit was there in that?"[2] But for these two exceptions, all friends and judges were unanimous in their applause. The May number of the *Critical Review* spoke of the "admirable observations" that occur in the chapter on "Dramatic Poetry" as proving "our essayist" to be "almost the only critic who has yet appeared worthy of Shakespeare." Voltaire and his party had suffered a final defeat. If his favourers, the reviewer went on, "have one grain of modesty or candour, the controversy, if so unequal a conflict can be so called, is now at an end; the age has scarcely produced a more fair, judicious and

[1] This might serve as a definition of Kames's critical method; cf. above, p. 121.

[2] BOSWELL'S *Johnson*, Globe ed., p. 203.

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classical performance of its kind than this *Essay*." When James Harris, the author of *Hermes*, and a "devotee of the Stagyrite," objected that "more profound reverence" should have been paid to the rules of Aristotle, Mrs Carter, that learned Greek scholar, reassured her friend by observing that Aristotle was, no doubt, "very respectable from an amazing depth and precision of understanding," but that "not a single ray of poetic genius" enlivens his writings, "utterly destitute of the colouring of imagination."[1] These were apparently Mrs Montagu's proper qualities. No less a personage than George Grenville, the Prime Minister, declared her style and manner to be full of "imagination, elegance and correctness." "We have read that admirable work," he wrote to Lyttelton about the *Essay*, "by our fireside, over and over, to form the taste of our young people," and Lyttelton, in his delight, answered that Mrs Montagu would be made "very happy" by such high approbation.[2] Congratulating letters poured in upon her; one of them, from Dr Blair, "would raise my vanity," she says,

[1] Mrs CARTER'S *Letters to Mrs Montagu*, ii., 22-3.
[2] *The Grenville Papers*, iv., 423-5.

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"if I did not know the courtesy with which authors are addressed."[1] On 16th August she mentions to her husband a visit of "Mr Burke. . . . He tells me my book is very successful. Reynolds, the famous painter, laid five guineas it was written by Mr Warton, who wrote the *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*,[2] but said at the same time the *Essay on Shakespear* was written with more imagination and fire. Reynolds has paid his five guineas, so dangerous it is to guess at authors when they don't put their names to their works." So pleased was she with her reception, that she hardly wished any longer to travel anonymously to fame. On 10th September, probably, she thus wrote to her husband:

"My Dearest,—The *Monthly Review* is the only periodical paper which has not treated my essay with indulgence, but I think they will not do the work much harm, for much of their cavilling is unintelligible. They say the language of the *Essay* is affected and in many places corrupt, and triumph over a

[1] Mrs Montagu to Lord Lyttelton, from "Hill Street, July the 20th" (in Mrs Climenson's Collection).

[2] Joseph Warton (1756).

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sentence falsely printed. They write with peevishness and ill manners even to great Shakespear himself, so how can his poor little Critick hope to escape? . . . It is whispered in Town that I am the author of the *Essay*, and perhaps with these Reviewers the work has not met with more candid treatment for being a Lady's. I expected all Mr Johnson's, Warburton's,[1] and Hurd's[2] friends, and all implicit disciples of Aristotle upon my poor work, so upon the whole I am well off that these Monthly Reviewers have not been more severe. Wherever I think their criticism just, I will profit by it by correcting the fault they blame in the next edition, if my work lives to another edition, as there is hope it may. It is printing at Dublin.[3] I repent I did not

[1] Whose edition of Shakespeare and Preface (not particularly interesting) had appeared in 1747. Cf. NICHOL SMITH'S *Eighteenth Century Essays*, p. 96 *sqq.*

[2] The editor of Addison and author of the *Letters on Chivalry* (1762).

[3] So Mrs Vesey had told her in July. And, soon after, Mr Montagu "read an advertisement wherein your book is to be had at the moderate price of two shillings. I suppose this is an Irish edition. The only remedy that I can think of will be to make some additions in a second one, tho' that will but in part prevent the mischief of so

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advertise it again before the Jubilee.[1] . . . I am so far well qualified for an author that I bear the Critick's lash with great fortitude. I had more reason to fear I should write below Criticism than to hope to write above it. I have ventured to contradict many established prejudices concerning Shakespear and concerning the Drama itself. . . . I cannot guess what these Criticks would be at, when they talk that Nature is the criterion, in points where people do not agree what is Nature. You will see my Brother seems much pleased with my work, but my greatest happiness is that you are so. Papa doats on the essay with all the partiality of a grandfather. I have endeavour'd to put a padlock upon his vanity, for the Gentleman is quite vain that

iniquitous a practice." Needless to say that Mr Montagu was quite enthusiastic about his wife's *Essay*: "My Dearest," he wrote on 7th September, "I congratulate you upon the good reception your book meets with, tho' it is no other than I expected, as it is founded in truth. . . . I think it could not have been published at a more fortunate time than before the Jubilee, and will add to the readers and consequently the admirers of the inimitable genius of Shakespear."

(Mrs Climenson's Collection).

[1] Held at Stratford on 6th September, Garrick being present.

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his Daughter has written a book." Indeed, Matthew Montagu, now living in Shepherd Street, London, had not been let into the secret till quite recently. On a "Sunday morn" in the same month of September, the "Essayist" had sent him the following letter of confession and apology:

"SIR,—My vanity has been exceedingly flattered by hearing that a small performance of mine in the critical way has met with your approbation—whatever share of that approbation I must attribute to partiality, tho' the author dare not be vain of it, the Daughter feels a still higher pleasure from it. The only abatement of my pleasure on this occasion is, lest you should imagine my not having communicated this affair has some air or appearance of disrespect; and as you both encouraged and cultivated those little talents Nature bestowed on me, I should appear ungrateful as well as undutiful, if you looked upon my reserve in that light. I will therefore take the liberty to explain some of my reasons for the secrecy with which I acted on this occasion. In the first place, there is in general a prejudice against female authors, especially if they invade those regions of

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literature which the men are desirous to reserve to themselves. While I was young, I should not have liked to have been classed among authors, but at my age it is less unbecoming. If an old woman does not bewitch her neighbors' cows, nor make any girl in the parish spit crooked pins, the world has no reason to take offence at her amusing herself with reading books or even writing them. However, some circumstances in this particular case advise secrecy. Mr Pope our great poet, the Bishop of Gloucester our great Critick, and Dr Johnson our great scholar, having already given their criticisms upon Shakespear, there was a degree of presumption in pretending to meddle with a subject they had already treated—sure to incur their envy if I succeeded tolerably well, their contempt if I did not. Then, for a weak and unknown champion to throw down the gauntlet of defiance in the very teeth of Voltaire appeared too daring. The French and Italians are fond of books of criticism, but they are not so much to the taste of the English. At present the desire of most readers is to be amused with something perfectly gay and superficial. I was obliged

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to enter seriously into the nature of the dramatick purposes, and the character of the best dramatick writings, and by sometimes differing from the code of the great legislator in Poeticks, Aristotle, I was afraid the Learned would reject my opinions, the unlearned yawn over my pages, so that I was very doubtful of the general success of my work. The booksellers who hate an author should print for himself would hardly advertise my book. . . . It was with great difficulty I got my *Essay* advertised the day before it was published, and in spite of all my pains it hardly appeared in the papers till the week after the King's birthday,[1] when the Town was empty, so that, all these disadvantages considered, I could not flatter myself this little work would succeed so well as it has done; if it remained in obscurity, as appeared to me too probable, it would only have been a mortification to my friends, and, tho', not being absurd, it could not disgrace, being neglected, it could not do me honour: therefore I communicated the affair only to three or four persons conversant in critical learning, whom I thought it necessary

[1] On 4th June.

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to consult before I ventured to publish, as it is unsafe to trust one's own judgment as to the merit of one's own compositions. The Critical Reviewers and other Monthly Writers have done much more than justice to my little work, and it is now printing in Dublin, to the increase of its fame, but to the prejudice of my profit as an author. I must tell you, my confidantes in this affair kept the secret very faithfully, and diverse persons were named as the authors of the *Essay*, and all such as did honour to it, but some persons who were acquainted with my manner of expression or style, if so careless a writer may be said to have a style, guessed at me ; great enquiries were made of the booksellers, who said they knew not the author. . . . The printer at last unluckily own'd that Mr Stillingfleet[1] corrected the press, and as he is an intimate friend of mine, this circumstance has in some degree betrayed the secret. I shall not own the work, nor would have any of my friends own it is mine, but leave people to think as they please. I am content to be a demirep in literature, but cannot have the effronterie to go further. Voltaire is very malicious as

[1] See below, p. 272.

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well as very witty; I care little for his censure of the work, but would not have him abuse the author. If he provokes me, I will take my revenge upon his dramatical works. . . .

"If this work lives to a second edition, I hope to present it to you improved, for it is very ill printed, and with many blunders. I do not affect to apologize for any faults in the writing by saying it was done carelessly or in haste, for indeed I took a great deal of pains about it, especially to make it short, as people are apt to complain of the dullness and dryness of criticism. My vacant hours were agreeably filled by this occupation, and, whenever I have health or leisure, I shall employ it in composition of some sort or another. If I had lived in the same age with Pope, Addison and Swift, and some others of that time, I should never have brandished my grey goose quill, but in our times a middling writer may expect a share of fame, which is now rather divided in small parcels amongst many, than engrossed by any superlative geniuses. . . . As the jubilee has awakened the love of the public to Shakespear, I have written a note to Dodsley from

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the author of the *Essay* to desire it may be advertised again. I shall be much obliged to Mrs Hawkins if she will put it into the penny post[1]—the further from Hill Street it is put in, the better, for I would not have Master Dodsley smell out the author."[2]

As the year drew to a close, the success of the book was more and more decided. On 26th November, Lord Lyttelton, in his pompous style, once more sent his congratulations, the exaggerated tone of which exceeded even the demands of politeness. "I don't wonder," he said, "that the admiration of the *Essay upon Shakespear* continually increases, or that it has been ascribed to all the great Witts in the kingdom. The greatest of them would be proud to father such a child; but it came from the head of the mother, our English Minerva, as the Grecian Minerva from Jove's, without the assistance of another Parent. Yet I claim the honour of having been the man-midwife who helped to bring it forth, an honour of which I boast more

[1] Mrs Montagu was writing from "Sunning Wells," where she was drinking the waters.

[2] These two unpublished letters have been very kindly communicated to me by Mrs Climenson.

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than of having been godfather to Glover's *Leonidas*."[1] Melmoth, the translator of Pliny, then residing at Bath, thanked her "for the pleasure and instruction she had afforded him in her late performance, in which she had most happily united the learning and judgment of Madame Dacier with the ease of Sévigné and the wit of Lenclos."[2] By the end of December so many acquaintances and strangers had become partakers of the secret, that such half-concealment was worse than publicity itself. "I am sorry to tell you," she wrote to Lyttelton on the 23rd, "that a friend of yours is no longer a concealed scribbler. . . . Being whispered, it has circulated with incredible swiftness. . . . Mr Melmoth, at Bath, puffs me; but I am most flattered that a brother author says, the book would be very well, if it had not too much wit. . . . I look very innocent when I am attacked about the essay, and say, 'I don't know what you mean!' I shall set about a new edition as soon as your lordship comes to town, for the first thousand is in great part sold, tho' the booksellers

[1] From Mrs Climenson's MSS.

[2] From a letter in Mr Broadley's Collection.

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have done me all the prejudice in their power."[1]

Nor was the influence and the fame of the work so ephemeral as might be supposed. In 1774, one Edward Taylor, the writer of *Cursory Remarks on Tragedy*, and a belated disciple of Aristotle, though unable by taste and theory to admire Shakespeare's "motley pieces" abounding in "impossibilities," acknowledged, however, that the dramatist's "preternatural beings seemed to need little or no justification," and that "it would be fruitless to say anything more on this point, as it had been already treated in such a masterly manner by the very ingenious author of the remarks on the writings and genius of Shakespear, to whose merit" even this opponent was "not the less sensible, though on many occasions he might be led to differ in opinion."[2] Maurice Morgann, Falstaff's lively advocate, whose defence of his hero runs to nearly a hundred pages, thus apostrophised our Essayist: "As for you, Mrs Montagu, I am grieved to find

[1] Printed in the *Grenville Papers*, iv., 496, n. 3, 498, and, with some inaccuracies, in DORAN, 150.

[2] *Op. cit.*, pp. 44-5.

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that *you* have been involved in a popular error; so much you must allow me to say;—for the rest I bow to your genius and your virtues: You have given to the world a very elegant composition; and I am told your manners and your mind are yet more pure, more elegant than your book. Falstaff was too gross, too infirm for your inspection; but, if you durst have looked nearer, you would not have found cowardice in the number of his infirmities."[1] None of the irony perceptible in this compliment appears in Beattie's comment about Johnson's adverse dictum on the *Essay*: "Johnson's harsh and foolish censure of Mrs Montagu's book does not surprise me," the Scotch philosopher wrote in 1785, "for I have heard him speak contemptuously of it. It is, for all that, one of the best, most original, and most elegant pieces of criticism in our language, or any other. Johnson had many of the talents of a critic; but his want of temper, his violent prejudices, and something, I am afraid, of an envious turn of mind, made him often a very unfair one. Mrs Montagu was very

[1] NICHOL SMITH'S *Eighteenth Century Essays*, p. 270 (1777).

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kind to him, but Mrs Montagu has more wit than any body; and Johnson could not bear that any person should be thought to have wit but himself."[1] Three years later, Cowper, coming across the volume, praised "the learning, the good sense, the sound judgment and the wit displayed in it." These qualities fully justified, not only his own compliment, "but all compliments that either have been already paid to her talents or shall be paid hereafter."[2]

Even in France the *Essay* had not remained completely unknown. In the year of its publication, the *Année Littéraire*[3] gave a French rendering of the "Introduction," as quoted in the *London Evening Post*; Mme. Riccoboni, one of Garrick's correspondents, having received from him a very early copy of the book, said, in acknowledging it, that "the pamphlet was very well written." "The reflections on Voltaire are just," she added, ". . . your author reproaches him with ignorance; *I* accuse him of base jealousy, unpardonable in a man of genius. Corneille is

[1] *Life of Beattie*, by Sir WILLIAM FORBES, ed. 1807, ii., 375.

[2] Quoted by DORAN, pp. 155-6. [3] T. iv., pp. 3-20.

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too severely censured in this little work. To a certain extent, I share your critic's opinion on this poet, but should not like to declare it publicly: Pierre Corneille is revered by the French, and, even if one disagrees with them, popular prejudices should be respected, whenever they do not clash with morals and honour."[1] Much more important than this slight notice and passing allusion was an article in the *Année Littéraire* for 1774[2] in which considerable extracts were borrowed from Clément's *Letters to Voltaire* on the Corneille Commentary. Here appeared for the first time in a French review "the very precious fragments of an *Essay* by 'Miladi Montaigu,'" where this famous writer had noted "the innumerable gross mistakes that had escaped the pen of the translator of *Julius Cæsar*." "Some of her remarks," Clément, and, after him, the reviewer pointed out, would enable the reader "to judge of Mr de Voltaire's sagacity and of the accuracy of his version." Shakespeare's adversary, they said, understood neither English prosody nor the language itself. He had misquoted "whore"

[1] GARRICK'S *Correspondence*, ii., 564-5, 16 juin 1769.
[2] T. vi., 38-9.

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instead of "harlot,"[1] misinterpreted the words "course" and "construe,"[2] and confused Brutus's simile of "ambition's ladder" in the second act.[3] Thus, even in its English garb, 'Miladi Montaigu's' *Essay* was slowly making its way into France, and undermining Voltaire's authority.

It must be confessed that English contemporary critics, refusing to extend their tender mercies to the *Essay* and its author, have sided with Johnson against Beattie and Cowper. In Mr Saintsbury's opinion, "Mrs Montagu's famous *Essay* is well intentioned, but rather feeble, much of it being pure *tu quoque* to Voltaire, and sometimes extremely unjust on Corneille and even Æschylus. It is not quite ignorant, but once more, non tali auxilio!"[4] Mr Lounsbury pronounces it "one of the most exasperating of books," and finds in Cowper's approbation of it a sure symptom of a coming fit of insanity.[5] Mr Nichol Smith also "attaches little import-

[1] Cf. *Essay*, p. 278, and VOLTAIRE, *Œuvres*, ed. 1877, t. vii., p. 468, n. 1.

[2] See above, p. 139.

[3] Cf. *Essay*, pp. 214-6.

[4] *History of Criticism*, iii., 173, n. 1.

[5] *Shakespeare and Voltaire*, pp. 294, 296.

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importance" to the work, which he considers as "a well-meaning, but shallow and unnecessary reply to Voltaire."[1] Johnson, he thinks, "had already vindicated the national pride in Shakespeare." Possibly,—but Mrs Montagu wished to go one step further than her predecessor. Believing that Shakespeare would be best defended by a counter-attack on his enemy, she meant to carry the war into Voltaire's own dominions and to conquer him there. With extraordinary audacity — we will not say recklessness — she resolved on giving the French critic a Rowland for his Oliver, on assailing his favourite Corneille, as he had assailed Shakespeare. No doubt, her aggressive ardour occasionally carried her into an extreme of impetuous injustice: she did not shrink from comparing one passage in *Lear* with another in *Clitandre*, because "they both happened to be on similar subjects."[2] She set poor Corneille's *Otho* by the side of *Henry IV.*, and, rashly triumphant, exclaimed: "See what Shakespeare has done, and decide between the

[1] *Eighteenth Century Essays*, p. xx.
[2] *Essay*, pp. 75-6.

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two!"[1] All this is, of course, the unreasonable criticism of a nervous woman. But, when she inveighs against the long speeches in *Cinna* and in most French plays, we remember our school-days, when we had to con them, and we sympathise with her dislike. Less prudent than Madame Riccoboni, we fly in the face of "popular prejudice," find fault with that "termagant," Emilie, with that degenerate Roman weakling, Cinna, that verbose ruler, Augustus, and shrewdly suspect the so-called "masterpiece" to rest on a pedestal of clay. We applaud the English lady's daring, when, in a perfectly fair fight against Voltaire, she thrusts at the giant, and pierces through his empty pretence to accuracy as a translator. Her trouble seems to us, not "unnecessary," but useful, as it contributed to the manifestation of truth. The merit of the *Essay on Shakespear* best appears from the point of view of the historian of comparative literature. Considered in its relations with English eighteenth-century criticism, it is deficient in originality. Its leading ideas are borrowed from Pope and Johnson; the questions of the unities, of the

[1] *Essay*, pp. 81-5.

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mixture of tragic and comic scenes, had been thoroughly sifted and settled before its time. But never had Voltaire been so frankly, so fully confuted, never had his literary authority been set at naught in a tone so peremptory that it must be heard even in France. In this sense, Mrs Montagu's work is that of a pioneer. There is no doubt that she opened the eyes of French critics to Voltaire's shortcomings as an English scholar, and that Shakespeare's cause profited by his adversary's partial loss of credit.

Nor is the work so "shallow" as a superficial, hasty reader might suppose. Clear in conception and in plan, it starts from a sort of axiom — the definition of the drama — which serves as a more or less solid basis for the whole enquiry. The principle that the dramatic artist should "instruct by pleasing," and should therefore be studied, first as a moralist, secondly as an inventor of fables and painter of characters, need not be discussed here. Mrs Montagu did not discover it, and its value, unquestioned by the ethical critics of her day, remains uncertain still. What concerns us now is that it gives to the nine dissertations contained in the *Essay*

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a unity they would otherwise lack. They run, almost uninterruptedly, along one or the other of those two primary lines of thought. Commendable by its composition, this "piece of criticism" is also remarkable by its good sense. Most unjustly has it been represented as "puerile where it is not ignorant."[1] Mrs Montagu never spoke of Shakespeare as "rude and illiterate," except in an ironical passage that should be interpreted as it was meant.[2] Fortunately for herself, she was not one of those for whom every word that Shakespeare uttered is more than Gospel-truth. She knew some of his qualities at least, and her tribute to them sounds as sincere as the lyrical rhetoric of a more modern school. Her psychological insight into the meaning and development of such characters as Falstaff and Macbeth is by no means contemptible in an age when such studies had hardly begun. On the other hand, her admiration did not blind her to the dramatist's obvious defects. She doubtless exaggerated them. It was a mistake to speak of the Elizabethan period as plunged

[1] LOUNSBURY, *Shakespeare and Voltaire*, p. 297.
[2] *Essay*, p. 117.

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"in the dark shades of Gothic barbarism," of Shakespeare's "happiest successes" as perhaps due to Chance, of "many speeches in the tragedy of *Macbeth*" as full of "bombast."[1] But was it so very wrong to say that he wrote in "unpolished times" for an "unlettered audience, just emerging from barbarity," that, even at Court, learning was then "tinctured with pedantry," that "too great a number of persons and events" appear in the histories, that "nonsense, indecorums and irregularities"[2] are to be met with occasionally? We do not suppose that the quibbling contests of the clowns and others, the courtship of Katherine by Henry V. or the Porter's speech in *Macbeth* are essential to Shakespeare's glory. We do not contend, either, that Mrs Montagu, because she proved Voltaire's ignorance, praised some of the dramatist's beauties and pointed out some of his defects, is a critic of very great importance. The natural coldness of her temper made her absolutely insensible to the incomparable poetic charm of many passages in the plays. But, considering her work as a polemical

[1] *Essay*, pp. 152, 101, 201.
[2] *Ibid.*, 5, 13, 9-10, 69, 78.

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treatise, we find it a courageous, effective answer to Voltaire's impertinent remarks, a well-planned and measured apology of the English dramatist.

IV

On her return from Northumberland in August 1775, Mrs Montagu went for her annual season at Tunbridge Wells, and there thought of accomplishing a long-cherished design, that of a journey to France, which her widowed state now gave her leisure to undertake. An interesting letter to Beattie[1] tells us of her intentions: "I have the happiness," she wrote, "of having Mrs Carter in my house, and Mrs Vesey is not at a quarter of a mile's distance; thus, though I live secluded from the general world, I have the society of those I love best. I propose to stay here about three weeks, then I return to London to prepare for my expedition to the south of France. I have

[1] *Life of Beattie*, by Sir WILLIAM FORBES, ii., 116-7 (3rd September).

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written to a gentleman at Montauban, to endeavour to get for me a large house in any part of that town. I am assured that the climate of Montauban is very delightful; the air is dry, but not piercing, as at Montpelier. . . . I think with some pleasure of escaping the gloom of our winter and the bustle of London, and passing my time in the blessings of cheerful tranquillity and soft sunshine." This hope, however, was not to be realised, nor did Montauban ever receive the distinguished lady's visit. No house could be found suitable for her there,[1] and Nice was next fixed upon as her journey's aim. She set out in October. But, as she was passing through Canterbury about the 20th, she fell ill of a "low fever," a sort of influenza, that made it very dangerous for her to brave "the howlings of the wind, the dashing of the rain, the roaring and agitation of a tempestuous sea." "By the advice of her doctor and the persuasion of her friends," Mrs Carter says, "she was prevailed on to give up the scheme till next summer; and I hope, now her resolution is taken, it will very much help

[1] Mrs CARTER'S *Letters to Mrs Montagu*, ii., 330 (8th October).

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to facilitate her recovery, if she keeps to her promise of living very quietly the whole winter. Her illness, I am persuaded, was occasioned by the excessive fatigue of business and company, in which she has been engaged ever since she left Tunbridge."[1] A short period of rest enabled her to resume her place in her brilliant circle. During the month of May 1776 she was giving "illustrious foreign dinners,"[2] M. and Mme Necker being presumably in the number of her guests. The future Comptroller-General and his wife were then in London, among such acquaintances as Gibbon, in the bloom of his fame,[3] and Garrick, whose acting in *King Lear* threw them into ecstasies.[4] It seems probable that to their entreaties was due Mrs Montagu's resolution to spend the summer in Paris.

Accompanied by her attendant Miss Gregory, her "adopted son and heir"

[1] Mrs CARTER'S *Letters to Miss Catherine Talbot*, vol. iii., 1819: *Letters to Mrs Vesey*, pp. 245-7 (25th October).

[2] Mrs CARTER'S *Letters to Mrs Montagu*, ii., 362 (28th May).

[3] The first volume of his *Decline and Fall* had been published in February 1776.

[4] See Mme Necker's letter to Garrick in his *Correspondence*, ii., 617 (14 mai 1776), and in JUSSERAND'S *Shakespeare en France*, pp. 240-1.

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Matthew, his tutor M. Blondel, and Mrs Carter's nephew, Montagu Pennington,[1] she embarked at Dover in the morning of Sunday, 23rd June, and, after an extremely quick passage of "two hours and ten minutes," landed at Calais. A "very rapid wind and pretty boisterous waves" had "wafted her thither." "I was not in the least sick," she immediately wrote to Mrs Vesey. "I sat on the deck, tho' the waves sometimes washed over my head." The long journey from Calais to Paris failed to interest her: "I was not much delighted with the prospects in my way," she told her brother and also Mrs Carter. "The dull monotony of despotism tires."[2] In passing, however, through the forest of Chantilly, she notes that she felt "the sublime melancholy which befits the great and solemn scene." Her first impressions of Paris proved somewhat unfavourable. "About midnight," she said,[3] "you arrive at l'hôtel du Parlement d'Angleterre. It is a large house; you pay very dear for getting a place in it; it has an air of dignity and

[1] The future editor of Mrs CARTER'S *Letters*.

[2] From a MS. letter in Mrs Climenson's possession; cf. Mrs CARTER'S *Letters to Mrs Montagu*, ii., 363-4.

[3] To Mrs Vesey, 15th July (Mrs Climenson's MSS.).

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magnificence which imposes—you may take that word either in the French or English sense, as you please: after knowing it more intimately, you discover it harbours a good deal of dirty vermin. Now I perceive you are angry, and fancy mine host Mr Picqot (*sic*) meant a satire on our Parliament House in calling his Hotel by its name. I assure you he is the politest man in the world of his occupation, and I am sure, if he had known certain resemblances and analogies, he would not have been guilty of so oblique a satire. . . ." The town itself she did not much admire: "The City of Paris," she wrote, "is in some respects like Bristol: streets narrow, dark and dirty in some parts, in others magnificent and fine."[1] Two months afterwards,[2] her opinion remained

[1] Cf. Mrs Carter's opinion in October 1782 (*Memoirs of Mrs Elizabeth Carter*, 1808, i., 452): "The buildings are magnificent; the streets so contemptibly narrow, that I saw very few wider than Fetter Lane. Indeed, we had a sorrowful proof that they are not very safe for carriages, as we were overturned in endeavouring to pass a waggon. . . . The only pleasant part of Paris which I saw was the quay on the banks of the Seine, which is wide and clean, and very safe walking, and perfectly free from any bustle of commerce."

[2] 7th September, to her sister, Mrs Scott (Mrs Climenson's MSS.).

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unchanged: "Miss Gregory and I are not yet cured of our astonishment at the nastiness, the stinks, and the narrowness of the streets, the wretched appearance of the common people, the miserable air of the shops."

Domestic manners had, in too many cases, a looseness and a slovenliness most repugnant to her taste for well-regulated arrangements. "I wish Montagu[1] was old enough," she exclaimed, "to see the sad effects of despotism, that the love of liberty and laws might make the earliest, and, consequently, the deepest impression on him, and teach him a due reverence for the English constitution. The influence of Government upon the mind and morals cannot be known by any one who has not been in some land of slavery. Here is no conjugal faith, paternal care, filial affection, brotherly love, except amongst a few, nor is there any domestick order. Servants in general have little regard for the family they live in; they are at board wages, eat at publick houses, and are gaming all day. Every antichamber is a gaming hole, for indeed, the antichambers, except in great houses, are the dirtiest and most miserable-

[1] Her nephew and heir, Matthew Montagu.

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looking places imaginable. Our footmen are allowed to carry our trains as we go upstairs . . . and, with the general sluttishness here, a staircase is very disgusting, often in smell, often in appearance."

She liked the people much better than their dwellings. "We must own," she enthusiastically wrote on 5th July, that "the French have infinitely more polite hospitality and agreeable, useful attentions than we have." The "men and women" she found even "more than polite, perfectly friendly if they can do you any service." "I meet with so much kindness, and have so many agreeable parties offered," she said, a very few days after her arrival, that "I know not how to avail myself of them all."[1] Her favourable opinion was only confirmed by time: "I am greatly pleased with the society at Paris," she told her brother on 11th August. "There is an ease and politeness that is very pleasing, and the conversation is always as wise and as witty as conversation should be in mixed society. They have found out that to please, one must seem to be pleased. Nor does any lady think it necessary for her glory to have

[1] To her sister on 2nd July.

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more company at once than can breathe in her apartment." Moving in "the hurlyburly of French suppers," Mrs Montagu did her best "to lead the life of a Parisian lady." Her natural complexion disappeared under the vermilion dye of the fashionable paint; "a churchyard cough," she laughingly observes, "would become me better than the rouge I wear." She took "unheard-of pains to express herself in French," and her vain efforts reminded her hearers of their own "torments when, in England, they understood no one, and were understood of no one."[1] But all did justice "to her wit, her parts and distinguished manners." The French visitors she had received in London now entertained her in Paris. "Madame Necker," she wrote on 2nd July, "came to Paris to carry me to her box at the play to-night, but I had company I could not

[1] Mme Necker à M. Gibbon, GIBBON'S *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. Murray, 1814, ii., 179-80 (30th Sept. 1776). Cf. Mme du DEFFAND, *Lettres à Horace Walpole*, ed. 1824, vol. iii., p. 321: "Je vois quelquefois madame Montagu; je ne la trouve pas trop pédante, mais elle fait tant d'efforts pour bien parler notre langue, que sa conversation est pénible" (dimanche, 18 août 1776). See also *Ibid.*, p. 328.

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leave. I am to dine with her at her house near Paris on Saturday to meet all the Beaux Esprits." This was Necker's country-seat at Saint-Ouen, between Paris and Saint-Denis, a "pleasant abode," with its terrace overlooking the Seine, and its "shady groves" frequented by so many illustrious men of letters.[1] Of one of the famous suppers there, Mrs Montagu says: "There was a great deal of good company, great elegance and order in every thing; the Neckers are amiable and respectable, as well as learned and ingenious. There was of the party a Madame du Deffand, much celebrated for her wit. She had desired to be introduced to me, was exceedingly obliging, and I was charmed with her, and the more as she is fourscore years of age, totally blind, and as gay and lively as 18. She eat a very hearty supper, and I left her behind me at one in the morning." On another occasion,[2] Mrs Montagu spent the Sunday "at Madame Necker's country-house very agreeably. Monsieur Buffon, le Chevalier de Chastellux,

[1] See D'HAUSSONVILLE'S *La Salon de Madame Necker*, 1882, i., 125-6.

[2] 4th August.

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and Monsieur Thomas were of the party; they were all polite to me, and just to Shakespeare," whose merits "the learned Academicians" had doubtless discussed with her during their "gentle walk in the evening along the banks of the Seine, the most discreet of all rivers, somewhat of a sloven, indeed, but gliding very temperately along." Let us note that, though Mrs Montagu's book had not yet been entirely translated into French, its existence was well known. She felt proud of her fame and importance as a critic. "I was quite overcome at first with the compliments I received on the subject of my book," she writes, delighted, "but now I mind them no more than Greg (Miss Gregory) does the thunder. My very Coiffeuse, while she curls my hair, flatters me on my reputation as an author. Talents give a much greater relief here than in England. Celebrity is the object here, to get riches and power the objects in England." What of those who, like her, had compassed both? Her presence was courted, therefore, with a double amount of affability. Not by Mme Necker only, but by the Neapolitan ambassador, "le marquis Caraccioli," at

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whose house she "found the representatives of all the kings and states in Europe, and Messieurs Buffon and d'Alembert, and the most pleasing of all the beaux esprits, le chevalier de Chastellux, whose manners, like his birth, are truly noble." In the evening she went to Madame Geoffrin, now much decayed, and nearing her end.[1] But, of all the titled ladies and bourgeoises she mingled with, her favourite probably was that Comtesse de Rochefort whom Horace Walpole has praised so highly: "Her understanding," says he, "is just and delicate, with a finesse of wit that is the result of reflection. Her manner is soft and feminine, and though a *savante*, without any declared pretensions. She is the *decent* friend of Monsieur de Nivernois,"[2] whom Mrs Montagu had known in London as French ambassador. Her opinion of the Countess agreed with Horace Walpole's.

[1] She died on 6th October 1777, at seventy-eight.

[2] Cf. HORACE WALPOLE'S *Letters*, ed. Toynbee, 1904, vi., 407-8. "The Duc de Nivernois has parts, and writes at the top of the mediocre, but, as Madame Geoffrin says, is manqué partout; guerrier manqué, ambassadeur manqué, homme d'affaires manqué, and auteur manqué —no, he is not homme de naissance manqué."

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"I believe," she writes to her sister, "you have heard me often speak of la Comtesse de Rochefort, of whose charms of conversation I had heard much. She is really the most charming woman I ever saw. She has been very handsome, is now not young, but her person is very genteel, and she has all the graces for her handmaids, tho' she has ceased to be a Venus."

The better to receive all her friends, whom Mr Picquot's "dirty vermin" might have deterred from coming, Mrs Montagu, about 15th July, hired "a house at Chaillot," with a "pretty garden" and a view of the Seine, "at the gates of Paris almost." As there never were "any robberies," she could, in a quarter of an hour, drive back at night to her new abode, which she thus describes: "My house is most delightfully situated, having a view of the finest publick buildings in Paris, just at the distance one would place them to form a picture. The Seine, which is of the colour and consistence of green pease soup in Paris, is of a better colour here, and takes up no more nor less of the landscape than the eye is willing to afford it." The recruiting of servants, unfortunately,

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remained a source of trouble: "No female could be got of the decent and cleanly sort of our under-servants," and her "family was composed of English, French, German, Italian, and Flemish persons." "All this does very well," she wisely remarks, "in the holiday of health, but it is unlike my orderly domestick system in England, which, like a good clock, seldom wants to be new-regulated." She had, however, discovered "an excellent cook," and sometimes gave dinners to "Monsieur de Buffon and several of the Academy." She was becoming a Parisian celebrity.

To the author of the *Essay on Shakespeare*, French acting and plays were, of course, matters of deep interest. As could be expected, her attitude remained that of a critic violently prejudiced and hostile. That she should find fault with the wretched accommodation for spectators in our theatres then or since, seems only natural. "At the playhouses," she says, "some dirty women lead you through dark, horrid passages to your box; the playhouses are so very small and so dark you can hardly discern the faces of the persons in the next box. The

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stage is small, but well enough lighted." On the other hand, her censure of the actors and actresses may sound somewhat trenchant: "I have seen a very pretty comédie,"[1] she wrote on 14th July, "and the *Zaïre* of Voltaire. . . . The comédie pleased me extreamly, and if, as my friend Dr Young says, *Wonder is involuntary praise*, why, I praised the tragedy. How shall I make you conceive it? For a heroine, take a vixen in hystericks, for the hero the most angry bull that has roared at a bull-baiting. Let them bellow and scream till they amaze you. . . . The famous Lekain[2] acted Orosmane, and he acted it *prodigiously*, *prodigiously* indeed! Mr Garrick is always lost in the character he acts: one admires Macbeth, and Lear, etc., but one never thinks of Mr Garrick the whole time he is upon the stage. . . . But it is always Monsr. Lekain who acts Monsr. Voltaire. . . . Then the part of Lusignan is done in a quite different manner. Mr Garrick looks so old,[3] so sick,

[1] *Le Méchant*, by GRESSET.

[2] Mrs Montagu, not yet familiar with French names, writes "le du kin" and "Monr du kin."

[3] On Garrick's Lusignan, see P. FITZGERALD'S *Life of David Garrick*, ed. 1899, p. 266.

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so afflicted, it is past bearing; the French Lusignan is neither sick nor sorry. Zaïre rends, tears, stares, screams, well-befitting a tender sex subject to convulsions and hystericks. What is polite life good for, if it does not put people some inches above nature? . . . However, all these tones are modulated by art, all the gestures regulated. When the despairing heroine walks off the stage, her hands are held as high above her head as she can stretch her arms. All this, custom has rendered agreeable, so, what cannot custom do? Madame Necker and Monsieur Necker, to whom I was engaged to supper, came to my box, and proposed to me to go in their coach to their country-house, that we might talk over the play as we went. I was discreet, and did not express above a thousandth part of my sensations. . . . I wonder the comedies please, for they are natural and easy."

By a singular coincidence, it was during Mrs Montagu's sojourn in Paris that Voltaire's quarrel against Shakespeare came to a crisis. For more than three years, a portentous announcement had agitated the public and philosophic mind: "a complete and faithful

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translation" of the dramatist's works, by "Messieurs le Comte de C[xxx] et le T[xxx]," [1] was preparing. At last, in March 1776, the long-expected and much-dreaded petard had exploded, threatening instant destruction to that time-honoured fabric, the French tragedy. Letourneur, the responsible perpetrator of the misdeed, guiltier far than his two accomplices, the Count of Catuelan and M. Fontaine-Malherbe, surely was a bold and dangerous heretic! Not only had he inveigled all the Royal Family—the King, Queen, Princes, and Princesses—into subscribing to the work: in an Epistle to His Majesty, conceived and written "in the worst possible taste," he had dared to assert that "till now the Father of the English stage had never been shown to the eyes of the nation, except in a ridiculous travesty"; further on, the same translator and biographer, in the excess of his zeal, commended his author for having found "a host of interesting characters in the lowest classes of society," for having neglected "all rules, except those suggested to him by a deep knowledge of the human heart" and an original genius.

[1] *Année Littéraire* for 1772, t. iv., p. 69.

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Were we to discard, henceforth, the unities, the proprieties, the great models left by Corneille and Racine, whom Letourneur did not even condescend to name? Whom did this impudent Shakespeare-worshipper mean to attack in the following sally, that concluded his Preface and Extracts from sundry English critics? "In Paris," Letourneur said, "some sprightly Aristarchs have already weighed Shakespeare's merits in their narrow scales, and discovered the exact amount of his beauties and his defects, though he has never been translated into French. They never read this poet, whose language they do not even understand; but they insist on describing him in one word as a Savage, who chanced to light upon some lucky touches, vigorous and thick enough, but without anything precious to offer to a delicate and polite nation."[1] Was it a personal innuendo, thought Voltaire, who remembered his lavish abuse of Shakespeare, and whose anger increased with the success of the work. Two volumes had appeared early in 1776, the first containing the various

[1] *Shakespeare traduit de l'Anglois*, ed. 1776, t. i., pp. iv., lxxv.-vi., cxxx.-i.

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Prefaces and *Othello*, the second the *Tempest* and *Julius Cæsar*. No doubt, public opinion remained divided and uncertain, as Grimm said.[1] The *Année Littéraire* censured Letourneur's profuse praise of the dramatist, his attacks on "the principle of the three unities, that fundamental rule of tragedy," his commendation of the mixture of comic and tragic scenes. It laughed at the monsters and sailors in the *Tempest*, at the "barbarous irregularities that deface *Julius Cæsar*." But, in the very same numbers, the reviewer made the most interesting — and irritating — remarks: "It is certain," he wrote, "that Orosmane is nothing but Othello in a French habit, and that Zaïre has something of a family likeness with Desdemona. . . . *Othello*, therefore, is indisputably the mine from which *Zaïre* was dug up," though M. de Voltaire, of course, polished the rough diamond into a fine jewel.[2] With almost brutal directness, the *Journal anglais* declared that to *Julius Cæsar* was due the only pathetic scene in Voltaire's play,[3] and that the fourth act of *Mahomet* also

[1] *Correspondance littéraire*, ed. Tourneux, 1879, t. xi., p. 215 (mars 1776).

[2] 1776, t. ii., p. 43-5 ; *ibid.*, p. 246 ; t. iv., pp. 74-5.

[3] La *Mort de César*, probably written in 1731.

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had been borrowed from Shakespeare.[1] We now understand why, in Grimm's words, "the devotees of Ferney could not read, without much ill-humour, a work that was to reveal to France the admirable skill with which M. de Voltaire had appropriated Shakespeare's beauties, and the less admirable bad faith with which he afterwards dared to translate him." We likewise understand Voltaire's fierce denunciations of Letourneur in his famous letter to d'Argental, written on 19th July and immediately circulated in Paris, his lamentations that this monster of a translator should have partisans, that he himself should have been the first to speak of Shakespeare to the French in times gone by, and to show them "the few pearls he had gathered in that enormous dunghill." The course of the philosopher's overflowing wrath has been already traced with such minuteness,[2] that we may be allowed here to make a long story short, and simply to state that, in less than a week, between 19th

[1] No. 20, 30 juillet 1776, Réflexions sur le *César* de Shakespeare, pp. 194, 198.

[2] By Mr LOUNSBURY, *Shakespeare and Voltaire*, ch. xvii.-xviii.

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and 26th July, Voltaire's final indictment of Shakespeare in a *Letter to the Academy* was composed, and that his faithful "lieutenant" and disciple, d'Alembert, undertook to read it in the public sitting of Sunday, 25th August, the festival of St Louis.

In the morning, the Academicians met in the chapel at the Louvre to hear the annual panegyric of the saint. Mrs Montagu, having procured tickets, attended both sermon and mass. "It was a very good historical discourse," she wrote on the 27th, "preached by a most reverend-looking Capucin"—Père Elisée[1] by name—"but on the right hand of this man of peace stood a guard with his bayonet. It may be an excellent method to prevent heresies from spreading to cut off the head of the preacher where the root of the heresy lies, but otherwise it is rather shocking to see an armed man standing ready either to oppose or to enforce doctrine, nor is this all that is extraordinary. The good Capucin divided his discourse into two parts; at the end of the first he paused an instant, and the congregation clapped him

[1] See the *Academy Registers*, 1895, t. iii., p. 399, quoted by JUSSERAND, *Shakespeare en France*, p. 305.

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in the same manner we do our favourite actors. At the end of the sermon, or properly at the exit from the pulpit, he was again clapped by men, women and children. I could not help expressing my surprise at this to a very ingenious Academician, and asked him whether it was usual to have a clerk stand in armour by the pulpit and to clap the preacher. He said a guard stood by the pulpits in the churches, but that it was not usual there to give that sort of applause. However, this is a consecrated chapel, the host was on the altar . . . and," she adds in another letter,[1] "as soon as lifted up by the priest, all the Catholick part of the congregation acknowledged the real presence, and Mass was performed with due ceremony."[2]

[1] To Mr Burrows, from Chaillot, 6th September, first published in Miss GAUSSEN'S *Later Pepys*, 1904, i. 110-7. On pp. 112-3 is an interesting account of the singular "trial at Le Châtelet before le Lieutenant Criminel," where "La Caisse de Poissy" was the plaintiff and l'Abbé Baudeau the defendant. Grimm's narrative (*Correspondance littéraire*, 1879, t. xi., pp. 313-4) agrees with Mrs Montagu's.

[2] In a letter to Mrs Vesey of 7th September, she returns to the offensive plaudits: "I must tell you at the same time," she says, "for I should hate to misrepresent any

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After this solemn morning prelude, the real business of the day came on in the afternoon. Convened for their yearly public meeting, the Academicians, twenty-four in number,[1] assembled again at the Louvre and took their seats "round a table." "Behind them, rows beyond rows, sat or stood the audience, or, more properly speaking, the spectators; for in what country are there not more who go to see publick orations than to hear them? Le Chevalier de Chastellux opened the session in a very ingenious and elegant manner," by a "pretty long speech," said Grimm, "carefully composed and adorned with subtle ingenious conceits which, being feebly connected together and never grouped in large masses, failed to produce any strong effect."[2]

people, especially a people from whom I have received great civilities, and for whom I have due admiration, I was assured that the sermon on St Louis was clapped as being a political affair. . . ." (From Mrs Climenson's MSS.)

[1] See the *Academy Registers* (*loc. cit.*): "A l'assemblée de l'après-midi, Mrs de Chastellux, Batteux, d'Alembert, Foncemagne, le duc de Nivernois, l'archevêque de Lyon, l'évêque de Limoges, le maréchal de Duras, Radonvilliers, de Buffon, de Paulmy, Ste. Palaye, Watelet, Marmontel, Thomas, St Lambert, Arnaud, Suard, Delille, La Harpe, Saurin, Gaillard, Bréquigny, Beauzée."

[2] *Correspondance littéraire*, 1879, t. xi., p. 315.

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"Two rival bards,"[1] Mrs Montagu went on, now "presented their translations of the parting of Hector and Andromache at the Scean gate, when little Astyanax was affrighted at the plumes on his Father's helmet. . . ." As the "laureate pieces" were being read by M. de la Harpe, "one of them was by the audience thought greatly superior to the other, but, in both, Hector was much polished by his travels in France. He did not send his Dame home to mind her household business and mend little bibs. As to Madame Andromaque, she was most loquaciously dolente, like the widow in our *Grief à la mode*. Then, for Monsieur son fils, he was nothing like the ignorant, raw, blubbering boy in Homer. It was vastly pretty to have him so unnaturally natural, so very simple without simplicity, and reason about the helmet, because he could not reason. If a man was to study to be naïve for a hundred years, he could not hit it better; and so, the audience clapped exceedingly, and divided the prize between the two poets. Had Homer himself been there,

[1] "M. Gruet, avocat au Parlement . . . et M. André de Murville" (*Correspondance littéraire*, pp. 315-6).

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he would not certainly have got one sprig of laurel. Old Shakespeare and he must be content with the immortal garlands with which great Nature crowned them; they are the evergreens of time, gathered in her universal common field, where genius ranges uncontrolled, not culled and picked in the nice parterre, or hothouse, where regions and seasons are confounded and blended."

In his account of the proceedings, Grimm reports an observation made by a "foreign lady of much sagacity," Mrs Montagu herself: "I am afraid," she said, "the Academy will scarcely reach its aim. Here are young poets, whose feeling for the simple beauties of the Ancients is very weak, and here are judges and hearers who care little about such simplicity. The few applauded strokes are precisely the most remote from the truth of the original. Homer was not witty enough to say that Hector, covering his son with kisses and tears,

> Tenderly rocked him in those sinewy arms,
> Which for so soft a toil Mars never made.

Yet, lines like these and flourishes of this kind win all suffrages in the assembly." With less displeasure, but without Grimm's

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exuberant enthusiasm, she heard the address in which the Abbé Arnaud praised the "immortal bard of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," and, summing up in an impartial judgment the conclusions of the dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns, maintained that, in the arts, perfection is not, as in the sciences, dependent on the slow progress of knowledge, but may be reached at a bound, that, therefore, the poet first in the field could gather the freshest impressions from Nature, and so bear off the palm from all his successors. "After the poets had received the prize," Mrs Montagu wrote, "l'abbé Arnaud made a discourse on the utility of studying and imitating the classics, and said much in praise of original genius, but gave an oblique hint that genius never bloomed north of the most northern part of France, and that men of genius must not study certain barbarians. But this was done so gently and obliquely, that one was not obliged to understand it, and I would not seem to do so."

Now came the grand event, announced a month before by Grimm, with tremblings in his voice. Voltaire, by the mouth of

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d'Alembert as his herald, was to declare war against Shakespeare and to denounce the translators to the indignation of the Academy. "What would be the consequences of this act? It was difficult to foresee, but they must be exceedingly grave. Every one knew that England worshipped Shakespeare's genius as the god of her idolatry. Would she allow the French Academy quietly to discuss the reasons of this cult? Would she acknowledge the authority of these foreign judges? Would she not try to form a party in the very stronghold of our literature? Who did not know how often such quarrels, and for much smaller objects, had provoked hatred and sectarian fury? All minds therefore were in a ferment,"[1] expecting something strange. —Nothing new came to the ears of the distinguished audience, of the English ambassador, of Mrs Montagu, of all those who "patiently listened to this singular diatribe." It was lively in tone and style, but as trite in matter as a thrice-told tale. It once more recalled the writer's eminent services in the cause of Shakespeare. Far from disfiguring and travestying that author in his translations,

[1] *Correspondance littéraire*, xi., 299 (juillet 1776).

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as Letourneur falsely accused him to do, Voltaire, as he indignantly reminded his colleagues, had been the first among them to learn English, to make Shakespeare known in France, and to translate freely some passages into verse. *Jules César*, he again asserted, was the most exact rendering ever seen, much more so than the so-called literal version by Letourneur and others! Why had they suppressed that interesting quibble in *Cæsar* on "soul" and "sole,"[1] and that polite speech of Iago to Brabantio in the first act of *Othello*? No doubt, they would conceal in their forthcoming volumes those gross indecencies which Voltaire revelled upon and d'Alembert demurely skipped, hinting at monstrosities! Why should this translator, this "secrétaire de la librairie de Paris," endeavour to "immolate France to England in a work dedicated to the King of France"? Was he not aware that, even in England, "Rymer himself, the learned Rymer, confessed that there was not a pug in Barbary, nor a baboon, but had more taste than Shakespeare"? Voltaire would not go quite so far. Truth compelled him to acknow-

[1] Act I., Sc. i.

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ledge that, however wild, low, irregular, absurd Shakespeare's dramas might be, occasional sparks of genius shone in them. "Yes, gentlemen," the critic exclaimed, "in that dark chaos of murders, buffoonery, heroism, turpitude, Billingsgate speeches and momentous interests, there are found some natural, striking touches!" Such a mixture of good and bad would remind us of those Spanish tragedies played at the Court of Philip II., performed and imitated all through Europe. Of the poorness of Shakespeare's models, we could judge, Voltaire thought, by a certain tragedy called *Gorboduc*, "in which a good king, the husband of a good queen, shares, in the first act, his kingdom between his children, who quarrel for their share: the younger gives the elder a blow in the second act, the elder in the third kills the younger; the mother in the fourth kills the elder; the king in the fifth kills Queen Gorboduc, and the people, in a riot, kill King Gorboduc, so that, at the end, nobody is left." This clever sketch, borrowed from Rymer, was received, of course, with much laughter, and some noble Academicians doubtless felt that, coming from such miserable forbears,

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Shakespeare must be a very low fellow indeed! But he had great merit all the same, d'Alembert resumed, speaking in Voltaire's name: "So powerful was his genius that this Thespis became a Sophocles at times." Was, however, a polished and delicate nation like the French, enriched as it had been with the incomparable masterpieces of Corneille and Racine, to go to school to a barbarian, whom the infatuated Letourneur proclaimed "the god of the theatre"? No, indeed! "Fancy, gentlemen," Voltaire said in conclusion, "that Louis XIV. stands in his gallery at Versailles, surrounded by a brilliant Court: a Jack-pudding, a Gilles, dressed in rags, comes through the crowd of heroes, of great men and beauties who compose this Court, and proposes to them to leave Corneille, Racine and Molière for a buffoon who has happy sallies and makes grimaces. What, do you think, would his reception be?"[1]

Thus ended the *Letter*, which Mrs Montagu judged as follows: "Then rose Monsieur d'Alembert, to read a most blackguard

[1] *Œuvres complétes*, ed. 1879, t. xxx., pp. 351-3, 363-5, 370.

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abusive invective of Monsieur de Voltaire's against Shakespear, the translation of whose works, he apprehended, would spoil the taste of the French nation. He attributed to Shakespear many things he never said, he gathered together many things the rudeness of the age allowed him to say, and with a few mauvaises plaisanteries seasoned the discourse. With as much mauvaise foy he gave an account of the tragedy of *Gorboduc* and represented it as the taste of the nation in drama, tho' not ten people have for these hundred years read *Gorboduc*. This trash of Monsieur Voltaire's answered the great purpose of his life, to raise a momentary laugh at things that are good, and a transient scorn of men much superior to himself, but I must do that justice to the Academy and audience, they seemed in general displeased at the paper read. I was asked by an Academician if I would answer this piece of Voltaire's, and [he] did not doubt but I could do it very well. I said Mr l'abbé Arnaud had done it much better than I could, in the praises he had given to original genius and the benefits arising from the study of them (*sic*). That I

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remembered, sixty years ago, in the same Academy, old Homer had met with the same treatment with Shakespear; that they now did justice to Homer: I did not doubt but they would do so to Shakespear, for that great geniuses survived those who set up to be their criticks, or more absurdly to be their rivals." This was not the only good thing that Mrs Montagu is reported to have uttered on that day. Suard, one of the forty, having said to her: "Je crois, Madame, que vous êtes un peu fâchée de ce que vous venez d'entendre," she replied: "Moi, Monsieur! point du tout. Je ne suis pas amie de Monsieur Voltaire."[1] Some time before this, the letter to d'Argental being shown to her, in which Shakespeare's works were called "un énorme fumier," she observed that "ce malheureux fumier avait engraissé une terre ingrate," which repartee, she informs Mrs Vesey,[2] delighted the com-

[1] *Letters* of HORACE WALPOLE, ed. 1904, ix., 444-5.

[2] On 28th August (Mrs Climenson's MSS.). The saying, as reported in some books, has become quite a curiosity. Here is one instance (*The Memoirs of Hannah More*, by WM. ROBERTS, ed. 1834, i., 98, Mrs Boscawen to Miss H. More, 1776): "Perhaps you have heard her admirable bon mot, in answer to Voltaire's calling Shakespeare un fumier. She said: 'Il en avoit le sort savoir d'enricher des terres ingrates.'"

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pany, "as they knew Voltaire had got many of his fine things from Shakespeare." To come back to the sitting of 25th August, "many of the Academicians declared their dislike of what was done" by shrugging up their shoulders and other "strong signs of disapprobation." They apparently thought that the *Letter* "was not only unjust to Shakespeare, but unworthy of the Academy." Mr d'Alembert then brought the proceedings to a close by pronouncing "an éloge of Destouches, whose comedies are reckoned next to Molière's. There was a great deal of spirit and ingenuity in the éloge, and some anecdotes of Destouches that were interesting. Indeed everything but the paper of Voltaire was very ingenious, and such as did honour to the speakers and the assembly."

None of the dire consequences dreaded by Grimm ensued. Though Voltaire's pamphlet was soon translated and published in London, England remained absolutely calm. She did not even enter on a paper-war. In fact, the most excited advocate of Shakespeare against his French critic was not one of his compatriots, but a hot-headed Italian, Giuseppe

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Baretti,[1] who brought out in 1777 a *Discours sur Shakespeare et sur M. de Voltaire* written in French. This little book, a singular mixture of incorrections, vulgar abuse and vigorous invective, impartially blamed both Voltaire and Letourneur, the former for having translated parts of *Julius Cæsar* and other plays with a school-girl's ignorant literalness, the latter for having undertaken the impossible task of rendering Shakespeare's "compact, energetic, vehement" poetry into so polished, dainty and fastidious an idiom as the French language.[2] Some months before the publication of Baretti's volume, the Chevalier Rutlidge, "the son of an Irishman and born in France,"[3] had addressed the members of the Academy in his courteous *Observations au sujet d'une lettre de M. de Voltaire*, a work of much critical insight in a small compass. Not content with pointing out, as Mrs Montagu had done already,

[1] See on him BOSWELL'S *Johnson*, *passim*, and *The Autobiography of Mrs Piozzi*, ed. by HAYWARD, 1861, ii., 334-40.

[2] *Discours*, pp. 16-7, 21-2; cf. on this point LUIGI MORANDI, *Voltaire contro Shakespeare*, 1884.

[3] GRIMM, *Correspondance littéraire*, xi., 379-80 (novembre 1776).

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Voltaire's minute inaccuracies of expression, he went deeper into the question at issue, and conclusively proved the utter unreasonableness of translating, in a version of Shakespeare, English prose by French prose, English blank verse and rhyme by French blank verse and rhyme. The two languages could not be thus superposed. Shakespeare did not use those several forms of speech indifferently : prose he reserved for the familiar conversation of the lower classes ; as soon as he meant his style to increase in dignity, he had recourse to blank verse, and, whenever some powerful, sublime thought was to be engraved in the spectator's memory, he chose rhyme. The transitions from one form to the other were always so artistically managed as to be imperceptible, except to an English ear. Rising to a still higher level in his argument, Rutlidge contended that what Voltaire miscalled barbarism really was the representation of Nature, of the whole of Nature. Shakespeare's plays were not to be considered in parts or passages, but in their entirety : the much-derided scenes in the first acts of *Cæsar* and of *Romeo* would then assume their true dramatic significance. No rules, no unities of time or place could

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override or supersede the essential law of the drama, that it should present an accurate, interesting, striking picture of society in its diverse aspects. The artistic value of Naturalism was Shakespeare's sufficient justification. As there breathed more of this truth and life in him than in Corneille or in the elegant Racine, he must be held superior to his French rivals.[1]

Third in chronological order—and also in importance—appeared in a French garb Mrs Montagu's own *Essay*, entitled *Apologie de Shakespear*, "en réponse à la critique de M. de Voltaire, traduite de l'anglois de Madame de Montagu." The book had a short, but somewhat curious, history. When, in July 1776, the letter to d'Argental was going the round of the Paris salons, Grimm informs us that there were thoughts of having the *Apologie de Shakespear* rendered into French.[2] That intention took effect. "A young man here," Mrs Montagu writes,[3] "made a very middling translation of my *Essay*; happily it was not gone to the press, so I bought it

[1] *Observations*, pp. 49, 52, 57-8, 61.

[2] *Correspondance littéraire*, xi., 299.

[3] To her sister, Mrs Scott, the 11th (of September probably) (Mrs Climenson's MSS.).

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of him"—for twenty-five louis d'or—"rather than let him print it. While Voltaire lives, the writers of reputation dare not translate it, and I don't like to have it ill done. The fear of Voltaire here is comical. The Witts all tell you the most odious stories of him, but make court to him." After one year's delay, a new and anonymous version of the *Essay* was published simultaneously in London and in Paris. It met with a polite reception, except at the hands of Grimm, whom it almost threw into a fit of fury: "If this work does not prove so successful in France as it has been in England," he said,[1] "the translator's want of skill will not be the only reason of its failure. To the so-called prejudice in M. de Voltaire's judgments are opposed prejudices incomparably more revolting." How unbearably unfair it is to accuse the author of the *Horaces* to have painted his Romans after the manner of Scudéri or La Calprenède! What can be the justice of a criticism of Corneille that is almost exclusively founded on extracts

[1] *Correspondance littéraire*, xii., 7-8 (octobre 1777). The *Essay* was also translated into German, by Eschenburg in 1771 (LOUNSBURY, p. 290), and into Italian in 1828.

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from *Othon* and *Pertharite*? And what avails it to attack Voltaire about Shakespeare, when, with the exception of a few details in which it is not surprising that a foreigner should have been mistaken, the judgment arrived at by the Apologist on her hero tallies exactly with the French critic's? Is not the admission that Shakespeare wrote at a time when science was tainted with pedantry, that, at the Court of Elizabeth, a scientific obscure jargon was affected, that Shakespeare, either by contagion from or condescension for the public taste, often fell into the fashionable style, into "nonsense, indecorums, and irregularities"—is not such a concession tantamount to subscribing to all the strictures of Voltaire?—Yes, we might answer in Mrs Montagu's name—but with an all-important difference in tone, and with so full a sense of Shakespeare's beauties that the consideration of his conceded defects is almost obliterated in the end. Neither the *Mercure de France*[1] nor the *Année Littéraire*[2] thought that the *Apologie* unduly depreciated Shakespeare. "Though Mylady Montagu," the latter

[1] Novembre 1777, pp. 122-8.
[2] 1777, t. vi., pp. 217-56.

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reviewer said, "sometimes yields too much to her exclusive admiration of Shakespeare, her book is none the less one of the deepest and of the most judicious that have been published for a long while on the dramatic art. We are even compelled to assent to all the praise she bestows on the English poet for the strength and truth of his characters, for his skill in painting the passions and moving the heart. Her partiality appears only when she tries to justify the mixture of tragedy and comedy, so fatal to his style, the introduction of spectres and sorcerers on the stage, and the irregularity of his plays." She ought, in short, to have insisted more, both on Shakespeare's defects and on Corneille's beauties.

The same objections were made to the *Apologie* by Voltaire himself, when, in his last, but triumphal, journey to Paris, he sent to his colleagues of the Academy[1] a second *Letter*, which now serves as the preface to *Irène*. "Mrs Montagu," he said, "an estimable citizen of London, has been inspired with a pardonable zeal for the fame of her country. Preferring Shakespeare to the

[1] In March 1778.

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authors of *Iphigénie*, *Athalie*, *Polyeucte* and *Cinna*, she has written a whole book to assert his superiority, with that sort of enthusiasm which the English show for some fine passages in Shakespeare, that shine through the coarseness of his age. She has ranked him above all others, for the sake of such passages, natural and vigorous indeed, but almost always defaced by low familiarity." Contrasted with this excessive indulgence, how hard her condemnation appears of some defects in *Cinna* and *Rodogune*, of the constant use made by Racine of the passion of love! "Is it a lady's office to reprove the universal passion that causes her sex to reign?" No! Let Mrs Montagu hear Bérénice acted by Mlle Gaussin, and she will shed tears; let her attend a performance of *Phèdre* or of *Iphigénie*, and she will be "beside herself" with emotion and grief. How could she remain insensible to what has drawn, for the hundredth time, tears of admiration and compassion from Voltaire's aged eyes? "Let her and the English mind their own dissensions, and cease finding fault with the great men of France,"[1] exclaimed the dying

[1] *Œuvres complètes*, ed. 1877, vii., 330-3.

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philosopher, whose decease brought to a close that paper-war in which Mrs Montagu had borne no inconsiderable part.[1]

[1] On its real importance, cf. VILLEMAIN, *Tableau de la littérature au xviii.e siècle*, iii., 328: "Toute la controverse de littérature étrangère, au xviiie siècle, toute l'innovation qui se manifesta dès lors, est dans Shakespeare. La question de savoir ce qu'il est, à quel point on doit l'admirer, comment on doit l'imiter, est toute la question de critique moderne que le xviiie siècle nous ait laissée." The same critic, in an *Essai littéraire sur Shakespeare*, first published in 1828, and reprinted in his *Etudes de littérature ancienne et étrangère*, ed. 1846, p. 258, thus mentions the *Essay on Shakespeare*: "Mistress Montaigu a relevé, dans la version si littérale de *Jules César*, de nombreuses inadvertances et l'oubli de grandes beautés: elle a repoussé les dédains de Voltaire par la critique judicieuse de quelques défauts du théâtre français; mais elle ne pouvait pallier les énormes et froides bizarreries mêlées aux pièces de Shakespeare." Thereby we see that, nearly eighty years after its publication, Mrs Montagu's book was not yet forgotten, even in France.

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CHAPTER III

MRS MONTAGU'S SOCIAL AND LITERARY CIRCLE: THE BLUE STOCKINGS

I

ACTUATED by an inborn taste for society, which made her say that "the social state is truly the state of Nature, for it is that which is most agreeable to the nature of man, and that for which his great Author designed him,"[1] Mrs Montagu, soon after the death of her child, began to show her love of hospitality and magnificence in the frequent receptions she held every year, during the winter months, at her house in Hill Street. So early as April 1750, we find her entertaining distinguished strangers, like Mme du

[1] *MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 337 (1773).

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Boccage,[1] who has recorded, in her *Lettres sur l'Angleterre*,[2] the attentions she was honoured with: "In the morning," she wrote, "breakfasts, that enchant us by the cleanliness and elegance of the viands and of the utensils used to cook and serve in, pleasantly bring together English people and foreigners. We thus breakfasted to-day at 'Mylady Montaigu's,' in a closet lined with painted paper of Pekin, and adorned with the prettiest Chinese furniture; a long table, covered with pellucid linen, and a thousand glittering vases presented to the view coffee, chocolate, biscuits, cream, butter, bread toasted in many ways, and exquisite tea. You must understand that good tea is to be had in London only. The mistress of the house, though worthy to be served at the table of the gods, poured it out herself, as

[1] A native of Rouen (1710-1802), the writer of a tragedy, *les Amazones* (1749), of an epic poem, *la Colombiade ou la Foi portée au Nouveau Monde*, and of an imitation of Milton, le *Paradis Terrestre*. Her best work is, however, her *Lettres sur l'Angleterre, la Hollande et l'Italie* (*Œuvres complètes*, Lyon, 3 vols., 1762). Her salon in Paris long rivalled that of Mme Geoffrin, says M. de SÉGUR: *Le Royaume de la Rue St Honoré*, p. 35, n. 3.

[2] Pages 12-3, ed. 1762. The book was translated into English in 1770 (2 vols.).

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the custom demands, which to obey, English ladies put on a close-fitting, marvellously becoming dress, a white apron, a pretty little straw-hat, and these they wear not only within doors, but even along the Mall, at noon, when, like so many nymphs, they take their favourite midday walk in St James's Park." The gratitude of Mme du Boccage expressed itself with equal warmth in the following note, probably of the same date: "Je suis engagée à aller à la campagne pour quelques jours, Madame; ce qui m'empêche d'aller moi-même m'informer des nouvelles de la santé de Mr de Montaigu, et vous remercier de votre flatteur et beau présent; pour vous en marquer ma reconnaissance, je ne puis vous offrir que moi-même: voudrez-vous bien m'accepter et recevoir des pierres de Médoc pour des diamants de Golconde? Ma reconnaissance sans borne ne pourra remplir cette différence; vous aurez toujours la supériorité qui vous est due, et je serai éternellement avec le souvenir de votre mérite et de vos bienfaits, Madame, votre très humble et très obéissante servante."[1] So numerous were the invitations sent out

[1] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

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on gala days, that Mrs Montagu, on 24th December 1752, could tell Mrs Boscawen that her "Chinese room" had been "filled by a succession of people from eleven in the morning till eleven at night."[1] Six months later we read of a rout, which "rather more than a hundred visitants" attended; "but the apartment held them with ease, and the highest compliments were paid to the house."[2] All the guests united, of course, in praising the wonder of Hill Street at that time, the famous "Chinese" or "dressing-room" that resembled "the Temple of an Indian god. . . . The very curtains are Chinese pictures on gauze, and the chairs Indian fan-sticks with cushions of Japan satin painted: as to the beauty of colouring, it is carried as high as possible, but the toilette you were so good as to paint," Mrs Montagu writes to her sister, "is the only thing where nature triumps."[3]

Twenty years afterwards, Chinese ornaments having gone out of fashion, a new decoration appeared to the amused, smiling

[1] *Letters*, iii., 203.
[2] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 30.
[3] *Ibid.*, i., 271.

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eyes of beholders like Mrs Delany, whose astonishment stands on record in an ironical passage of a letter to her niece: "If I had paper and time," she says on 28th May 1773, "I could entertain you with the account of Mrs Montagu's *room of Cupidons*, which was opened with an assembly for all the foreigners, the literati, and the macaronis of the present age. Many and sly are the observations how such a *genius* at her *age*, and so *circumstanced*, could think of painting the walls of her dressing-room with bowers of roses and jessamines entirely inhabited by little Cupids in all their little wanton ways . . . unless she looks upon herself as the wife of old Vulcan, and mother to all these little loves!"[1] When "old Vulcan," enriched by his coal mines, departed this earth in May 1775, he left to his widow, "Mrs Montagu of Shakespeareshire,"[2] an estate "of £7,000 a year in her own power." What her receptions were about that time, we can see in some letters of Hannah More's: "I had yesterday

[1] *Autobiography and Correspondence of* Mrs DELANY, iv., 508.

[2] As Walpole impertinently calls her, see *The Letters of* HORACE WALPOLE, ed. Paget Toynbee, ix., 202.

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the pleasure of dining in Hill Street, Berkeley Square," the writer tells her sister, "*at a certain Mrs Montagu's, a name not totally obscure.* The party consisted of herself, Mrs Carter, Dr Johnson, Solander, and Maty, Mrs Boscawen, Miss Reynolds, and Sir Joshua, the idol of every company. . . . Mrs Montagu received me with the most encouraging kindness; she is not only the finest genius, but the finest lady I ever saw: she lives in the highest style of magnificence; her apartments and table are in the most splendid taste; but what baubles are these when speaking of a Montagu! her form (for she has no *body*) is delicate even to fragility; her countenance the most animated in the world; the sprightly vivacity of fifteen, with the judgment and experience of a Nestor. But I fear she is hastening to decay very fast; her spirits are so active that they must soon wear out the little frail receptacle that holds them."[1] And in 1776, this ethereal hostess, all mind, if not all soul, is again described by her delighted guest: "Just returned from spending one of the most agreeable days of

[1] *Memoirs of Mrs Hannah More*, by WILLIAM ROBERTS, 1834, i., 53.

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my life, with the female Mæcenas of Hill Street; she engaged me five or six days ago to dine with her, and had assembled all the wits of the age. The only fault that charming woman has, is, that she is fond of collecting too many of them together at one time. There were nineteen persons assembled at dinner, but after the repast, she has a method of dividing her guests, or rather letting them assort themselves into little groups of five or six each. I spent my time in going from one to the other of these little societies, as I happened more or less to like the subjects they were discussing. Mrs Scott, Mrs Montagu's sister, a very good writer,[1] Mrs Carter, Mrs Barbauld, and a man of letters, whose name I have forgotten, made up one of these little parties. When we had canvassed two or three subjects, I stole off and joined in with the next group, which was composed of Mrs Montagu, Dr Johnson, the Provost of Dublin, and two other ingenious men. In this party there was a diversity of

[1] But very much neglected now, though her *Millennium Hall* and her *Life of d'Aubigné* are still occasionally mentioned.

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Mrs. Montagu

Emery Walker Ph. Sc.

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opinions, which produced a great deal of good argument and reasoning."[1]

On some occasions, the company being less numerous or less literary, a dearth of animated conversation might be expected: recourse was then had to the illustrious actor, now retired from the stage, but whom Paris and London had long united in admiring: "The French ambassador and ambassadress, Lord and Lady Spencer, and the Garricks dined with me on Saturday last," Mrs Montagu writes in 1778, "and Mr Garrick was so good as to act the dagger scene in *Macbeth*, and King Lear on his knees uttering maledictions on his ungrateful daughters." A note, in acknowledgment of the artist's exceeding obligingness, was sent that very evening: "I cannot go to sleep," Mrs Montagu said to him, "till I thank you for the honour you did your country, your wit, and your friends, and the infinite delight you gave to their excellencies and the rest of the company. I dare not repeat to you what was said lest it should look like flattery; but I will tell you that Madame de Noailles thanked me above a hundred times for the

[1] *Memoirs of Hannah More*, i., 62-3.

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pleasure and surprise: she was thanking me and wondering at you all the way she went downstairs so earnestly, I was afraid she would fall and break her bones. Though they had heard so much of you, they had not the least idea such things were within the compass of art and nature. . . . The ambassador added to his admiration great sense of your good-nature and politeness; and, in short, there was such a chorus of praise and thanks as cannot be represented; and while they were uttering, Lady Spencer's eyes were more expressive than any human language. Then she amazed them with telling them how you could look like a simpleton in Abel Drugger, when murderous daggers and undutiful daughters were out of the question. With what pleasure shall I reflect on this evening, if you have not got cold! . . ."[1]

The time soon came, however, when even the splendours of Hill Street no longer satisfied Mrs Montagu, whose ambition grew as her riches increased. She fixed on the north-west corner of Portman Square as the site of her projected "new house," which, in

[1] GARRICK'S *Correspondence*, ii., 369.

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July 1779, kept her very busy with her architect, "Mr Adam," and his workmen. "He came at the head of a regiment of artificers," she writes to the Duchess of Portland on the 20th, "an hour after the time he had promised: the bricklayer talked about the alterations to be made in a wall; the stonemason was as eloquent about the coping of the said wall; the carpenter thought the internal fitting up of the house not less important; then came the painter, who is painting my ceilings in various colours, according to the present fashion."[1] On 18th August, she cherishes the thought of that "new house" with a "passion almost equal to that of a lover to a mistress whom he thinks very handsome and very good, and such as will make him enjoy the *dignity of life with ease*." She feels impatient to have it "fit for habitation, as I think," she says, "the large and high rooms and its airy situation will be of great service to my health; and I am sure such noble apartments will be a great addition to my pleasures. In the winter of the year and the winter of our life, our principal enjoyments must be in

[1] *MSS. of the Marquis of Bath*, i., 345.

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our own house."[1] More than a year elapsed, however, before she had done furnishing her new residence and gradually removing her family into it.[2] At last, in the beginning of December 1781, she settled "in perfect health and spirits in her Château Portman."[3] Early in 1782, she invited some friends to bid adieu to the "little loves" in the room of Cupidons: "I was three times with Mrs Montagu the week I stayed in town," says Hannah More.[4] "We spent one evening with her and Miss Gregory alone, to take leave of the Hill Street house; and you never saw such an air of ruin and bankruptcy as every thing around us wore. We had about three feet square of carpet, and that we might all put our feet upon it, we were obliged to sit in a circle in the middle of the room, just as if we were playing at 'hunt the slipper.' . . . She is now settled in Portman Square, where I believe we were among the first to pay our compliments to

[1] DORAN, *A Lady of the Last Century*, p. 255.

[2] Mrs Boscawen to Mrs Delany, 12th November 1781 (*The Autobiography, etc.* . . . of Mrs DELANY, vi., 65).

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[4] *Memoirs of Hannah More*, i., 241.

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her. I had no conception of anything so beautiful. To all the magnificence of a very superb London house, is added the scenery of a country retirement. It is so seldom that anything superb is pleasant, that I was extremely struck with it. I could not help looking with compassion on the amiable proprietor *shivering at a breeze*, and who can at the best enjoy it so very little a while. She has, however, my ardent wishes for her continuance in a world to which she is an ornament and a blessing." Horace Walpole himself, though often sarcastic in his remarks on Mrs Montagu and her belongings, expressed unwonted enthusiasm about them in a letter to Mason. "I dined on Monday at Mrs Montagu's new palace," he wrote on 14th February 1782, "and was much surprised. Instead of vagaries, it is a noble simple edifice. When I came home, I recollected that though I had thought it so magnificent a house, there was not a morsel of gilding. It is grand, not tawdry, nor larded and embroidered and pomponned with shreds and remnants, and *clinquant* like all the harle-

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quinades of Adam,[1] which never let the eye repose a moment."[2]

An original and once famous fancy of hers in Portman Square was her "feather-work" or "feather hangings," which it took her well-nigh ten years to make. "My great piece is not yet completed," she wrote in February 1784; "so, if you have an opportunity of getting me any feathers, they will be very acceptable. The brown tails of partridges are very useful, though not so brilliant as some others." She levied a voluntary tax on her friends' poultry-yards: "The neck

[1] On this architect, cf. the following remarks by Miss Berry, Walpole's editor and friend: "Three Scotch brothers, of the name of Adam, after a long professional study of architecture in Italy, on their return to England first applied the internal ornaments of the ancient apartments then lately discovered at Rome and at Pompeii to the decoration of London drawing-rooms. The application was bad, the taste minute and faulty—calculated for no room larger than a bath, and that in a warm country, where all hangings and paper were to be avoided. But their substitution of the Greek fret, the honey-suckle, the husk, and other ornaments of graceful contour, instead of the nondescript angular flourishes, was an approach to something like truth." It seems, then, that the "return to Nature" was simultaneous in architecture and in poetry.

[2] HORACE WALPOLE'S *Letters*, ed. Paget Toynbee, xii., 166.

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and breast feathers of the stubble goose are very useful," she told a kinswoman in 1786, "and I wish your cook would save those of the Michaelmas goose for us."[1] William Cowper, the poet, heard of the scheme through his cousin, Lady Hesketh, and celebrated it in a "eulogium,"[2] the beginning of which may be quoted here:

"The birds put off their every hue,
To dress a room for Montagu.
The peacock sends his heavenly dyes,
His rainbows and his starry eyes;
The pheasant, plumes which round infold
His mantling neck with downy gold;
The cock his arch'd tail's azure show,
And, river-blanch'd, the swan his snow.
All tribes, beside, of Indian name,
That glossy shine, or vivid flame,
Where rises and where sets the day,
Whate'er they boast of rich and gay,
Contribute to the gorgeous plan,
Proud to advance it all they can.
This plumage neither dashing shower,
Nor blasts that shake the dripping bower,
Shall drench again or discompose,
But screen'd from every storm that blows,
It boasts a splendour ever new,
Safe with protecting Montagu. . . ."[3]

And Horace Walpole has recorded that, on

[1] DORAN, pp. 326, 335.
[2] See his letter to Lady Hesketh, 19th May 1788.
[3] *On Mrs Montagu's feather hangings* (June 1788).

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13th July 1791, the work being at last finished and in place, Mrs Montagu gave a splendid inaugural breakfast to "seven hundred persons on opening her great room, and the room with the hangings of feathers."[1]

Those sumptuous apartments were now ready to receive the highest personages in the land. Writing on 25th April 1790, Hannah More had mentioned that her friend was "fitting up the great room in a superb style, with pillars of verd antique, and had added an acre to what was before a very large town garden. Still the same inexhaustible spirits," she went on, "the same taste for business and magnificence; three or four great dinners in a week with Luxembourgs, Montmorencies, and Czartoriskis."[2] On and after 13th July 1791, a succession of "public breakfasts," as Miss Burney called them, took place in Portman Square. They seem to have been inconveniently crowded. In Mme d'Arblay's *Diary* for Friday, 25th May 1792,[3] we read how "the table," loaded with a prodigious quantity of cold chicken,

[1] *Letters*, ed. Toynbee, xv., 1.
[2] *Memoirs of Hannah More*, ii., 226-7.
[3] *Diary and Letters*, ed. 1876, iii., 409-10.

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ham, fish, etc., "was not a matter of indifference to the guests at large," how it was "so completely occupied by company seated round it, that it was long before one vacant chair could be seized. The crowd" in fact was such that one "could only slowly make way in any part. There could not be fewer than four or five hundred people. It was like a full Ranelagh by daylight." Yet the Diarist found "the rooms well worth examination and admiration," the "noble pillars" especially. And Hannah More again, in the same year, thus writes to her sister: "You must know Mrs Montagu had, last week, the honour of entertaining the Queen and six princesses at breakfast, in Portman Square; and yesterday she made a great breakfast for *subjects*, to which we went. Almost all the fine people were there, to the number of two or three hundred. Breakfast was ready at one;—there was a fine cold collation. The Duke of Gloucester and Mrs Montagu sat at the head of the table—the foreign princess," the Countess of Albany, wife to the Pretender, "next" to them. "There was great profusion of ices, fruits, and all sorts of refreshments, and the gay

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coup d'œil — the sight of so many distinguished persons, was pleasant enough."[1] Only in her seventy-ninth year did she give up the heavy self-imposed duties of this extensive hospitality: "She is in perfect good health and spirits," Mrs Carter said in 1799, "though she has totally changed her mode of life, from a conviction that she exerted herself too much last year, and that it brought on the long illness by which she suffered so much. She never goes out except to take the air of a morning; has no company to dinner (I do not call myself company), lets in nobody in the evening, which she passes in hearing her servant read, as, alas! her eyes will not suffer her to read to herself. I flatter myself that this pause of exertion will restore her to us, and will help to prolong her life; and that a taste for the comfort of living quietly will for the future prevent her from mixing so much with the tumults of the world as to injure her health."[2] Singularly enough, the last convivial party she entertained doubtless consisted of the chimney-sweepers, on whom she charitably bestowed

[1] *Memoirs of Hannah More*, ii., 343-4.
[2] *Ibid.*, iii., 66.

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an annual feast.[1] She was much amused, she once told her sister, "with good Mrs Anguish's request for her chimney-sweeper's boy; I sympathise," she went on, "with her in tenderness for persons of that occupation, and all that come to my gate on May-day are admitted, tho' I do not send cards of invitation or give tickets of admission, but, if her protégé presents himself at my gate about one o'clock, he will find beef, mutton, and pudding provided for his entertainment. We begin to spread our tables before one o'clock, and there is a succession of dinners till four o'clock in the afternoon."[2] Thus did her large bounty extend, throughout her life, to high and low. On 26th August 1800, she passed away, in her eightieth year, and was buried in Winchester Cathedral.

[1] Or, as Mme d'Arblay puts it in a sentence too characteristic of her latest manner to be omitted here: "her annual festival for those hapless artificers, who perform the most abject offices of any authorised calling, in being the active guardians of our blazing hearths" (*Memoirs of Dr Burney*, ed. 1832, ii., 272).

[2] From Mrs Climenson's MSS.

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II

Not her receptions only, but thousands of letters to and from her, bear witness to her social importance. As Wraxall has justly noted, "many of the most illustrious persons in rank, no less than in ability, under the reigns of George the Second and Third, had been her correspondents, friends, companions, and admirers. Pulteney, Earl of Bath, whose portrait hung over the chimney-piece in her drawing-room, and George, the first Lord Lyttelton, so eminent for his genius, were among the number."[1] Her assistance had been eagerly sought by the latter in the education of his son Thomas,[2] the future "wicked Lord," whose wild freaks of extravagance and folly were an evil payment for, though perhaps not an unnatural consequence of, the lavish praise bestowed on his early promise in body and mind. The youth, in his seventeenth year, was already corre-

[1] *Historical Memoirs*, ed. 1904, pp. 86-7.

[2] Cf. above p. 37, and FROST'S *Thomas Lyttelton*, 1876, a book containing many documents, the authenticity of which seems to us questionable.

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sponding with the great lady, his father's collaborator in the *Dialogues of the Dead.* In 1760 he sent her a short "account of the proceedings of that ever memorable day, September the 1st," when the new mansion at Hagley Park was publicly opened:[1]

"Dear Madam," he wrote in his sprightly style, "If I had caught a fever occasioned by too great a hurry of spirits in doing the honours at the New House, or was otherwise indisposed, I might give in to your grave observation that in this world all is vanity and vexation of spirit, but, at present, being as well as ever I was in my life and in exceeding good spirits, I am not disposed to make hermitical reflections upon three as jolly and as agreeable days as ever I passed. . . . I will only tell you that the whole was conducted with less awkward ceremony and more politesse and ease than it was natural to imagine *un régal* of that sort would have admitted of. We were pleased, and every body seemed pleased with us—on such an occasion as the opening of a New House, when a whole county was invited, a very unusual phenomenon: I did not even hear that Miss A.

[1] Cf. above, p. 69.

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was angry because Miss B. sat before her. Female contentions subsided, and the genius of good fellowship reigned triumphant. . . ."[1]

About that time, Mrs Montagu was doubtless invited to the "dinners of six, all chosen esprits," among whom Lady Hervey,[2] fresh from Paris and the salons of Helvetius and of Mme Geoffrin, vented her enthusiasm for France and its ways. "Don't let her make an infidel or a French woman of you," Mrs Chapone once wrote to a friend, "for she is as terrible and dangerous as the monsters that stand on the French shore."[3] Neither philosophy nor free thought, however, excluded in her the most exquisite politeness and taste. In 1764 she sent the following note to Mrs Montagu, from St James's Place: "I have somewhere, Madam, read the following lines, and am very sorry to have proved they are not true:

"'Nought can restrain
Desire of twain,'

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[1] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

[2] The widow of John, Lord Hervey, Pope's "Sporus" and the author of the *Memoirs of the Reign of George II.*

[3] *The Life and Correspondence* of Mrs CHAPONE (*Works*, ed. 1807, ii., 166).

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for I had the ill fortune to miss of you both here and at your own house, the day before you left this town. . . . If you have not yet read *les Lettres du Marquis de Roselle*,[1] may I take the liberty to recommend them to you? I am pretty sure you will be pleased both with the sentiments and the style; I will mention no particulars, but long to hear your opinion of them, that I may either correct or approve my own by yours. I shall be glad to hear of your health, but don't think, Madam, that I mean to draw you into a correspondence with me; what you voluntarily bestow, I receive as charity with thankfulness, but won't like a trickster betray you into trading with a beggar. . . ."[2]

That compliments should have come in abundance to a lady so generous and so well connected is not surprising. Lord Sandwich, her husband's kinsman, writing to her in 1753, used the most flattering expressions of regard: "I am just returned," said he, "from taking a long walk in a very dirty country, and have taken off my wet clothes in a great hurry, that I might have the

[1] "A very pretty novel by Madame de Beaumont," says Horace Walpole, *Letters*, ed. Toynbee, vi., 163.

[2] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

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pleasure of some conversation with my dear Mrs Montagu, who is never absent from my mind. I think what pleasure her presence would give me, what a real benefit to me in my hours of retirement, then comes this cruel reflection that it cannot be . . . ."[1] In a First Lord of the Admiralty just turned out of office, this exordium showed considerable esteem indeed; nor was it a despicable piece of hypocrisy, coming as it did from an adept in the rites of the Cistertian Abbey at Medmenham. Lord Shelburne was perhaps a little more sincere, when, in December 1780, he wrote from Bowood Park as follows: "I do not recollect that for many years I have been so long without the smallest intercourse with Mrs Montagu. Lady Shelburne is very shy, but I hope and am sure she'll find means to assure you how much I value your friendship, and how proud I am to acknowledge myself beholden to it. . . ."[1] But who could ever trust Shelburne's professions, whom his contemporaries nicknamed "Malagrida" the Jesuit, and whom Fox despised and hated for his duplicity! With a deference equal to Shelburne's, the Lord President of the

[1] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

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Council in 1786, Lord Camden, better known as Chief Justice Pratt, explained to Mrs Montagu his reasons for not complying with a request of hers: "I should be very happy," he said, "if it was in my power to obey your commands, but I am under such circumstances of disability to make any addition to the list of Supernumerary Clerks, that I could not oblige my dearest friend in this instance—nay, I have precluded myself. It has been usual for every President in his turn to add one to the number, and he has generally been very young, frequently a mere child, so that when I came to the office, I found such a number that there was no probability the last upon the list could succeed to the employment in less than fifty years. . . . I did determine to add none myself. . . . Indeed, I went further, for I complained of it to the King, and assured him I would never request him to increase the number for any friend of my own while I had the honour to sit at the head of that board. . . ."[1] A refusal so polite and so well founded must have been taken almost as an honour.

Many literary men also were, at all periods

[1] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

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of her life, among Mrs Montagu's assiduous correspondents. Two eccentrics head the list. Through the pious scholar Gilbert West, an intimate friend of Lyttelton's, she had made, about 1750, the acquaintance of that singular Scotchman and historian of the Popes, Archibald Bower, who, out of zeal for the Roman Church, had become a Jesuit, and, later on, out of hatred for the Inquisition, had returned from Italy to England and the Protestant fold. When Mrs Montagu knew him, he was living at Sidcup[1] and compiling the last volume of his *History* in a little habitation that possessed, she said, "the proper perfections of a cottage: neatness, cheerfulness and an air of tranquillity, a pretty grove with woodbines twining round every elm, a neat kitchen garden, with an arbour from whence you look on a fine prospect."[2] He was "a very merry entertaining companion," having left "all gloominess in that seat of horrors the Inquisition. I breakfasted with him on Tuesday," Mrs Montagu went on; "he is but between two and three miles from Hayes.[3] . . . I never

[1] In Kent. [2] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 70.
[3] Where she had, at that time, taken a cottage

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saw any country more beautiful than about Chislehurst, where he lives; I cannot say much in praise of his habitation, which he calls his Paradiso; but indeed, to a mind as gay and cheerful as his, all places are a paradise. He is much engaged with those old ladies the popes, but says he will leave the Santi Padri for his Madonna," as Mrs Montagu was amiably called by him and Lyttelton; "he will teach me the pronunciation of Italian, which he has reduced into such a method it may be easily acquired. He taught it to Mr Garrick at Tunbridge."[1] In 1754, the work being at last completed, Bower paid a visit to his native Scotland, and, on 24th August, he sent to Mrs Montagu this short note, which we may quote as a specimen of his Italian style: "Che n'è divenuto mai della carissima Madonna! L'a il cielo, invidiando alla terra si gran bene, rapita a se? . . . Le scrissi già due mesi fa, dandole un succinto ragguaglio del mio pellegrinaggio trà le rupi e le balze del romantico Keswick. . . . Io sono stato cinque settimane, ed anche sono in questa metropoli, mà ne partiró la settimana pros-

[1] *Letters*, iii., 208.

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sima per la città di Dundee, nella di cui vicinanza sono gli stati del mio nipote, ch'intendo di visitare e vedere la casa, in cui prima spirai l'aura vitale. . . ."[1] In Bower's case, however, the hour of success was also that of bitterest trouble: his Protestant *History of the Popes* made him rancorous enemies who published some letters of his, accused him of being a Jesuit in disguise,[2] and tried to ruin him in the opinion of his best friends, Mrs Montagu[3] and Lord Lyttelton. It required all the influence of the latter, some years afterwards, to save him from the dangerous consequences of Garrick's resentment.[4]

Another curious figure in Mrs Montagu's world was the "little Père" Le Courayer, whose "good spirits" and "douceurs" in language and in manners struck and amused Mrs Delany in 1772.[5] This unfortunate theologian, the victim of his tolerance and

[1] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

[2] See on this affair WALPOLE'S *Letters*, ed. Toynbee, 1903, iii., 399-402.

[3] Who refused to give up her acquaintance with him: see a letter that does her great honour, in *Letters*, iv., 1-5.

[4] Cf. GARRICK'S *Correspondence*, i., 123-4, and FITZGERALD'S *Garrick*, ed. 1899, 235-7.

[5] *The Autobiography and Correspondence* . . . iv., 488.

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candour, had published in 1723 a very estimable *Dissertation sur la validité des ordinations des Anglois*, the liberal conclusions of which had incurred the censures of his superiors and driven him into exile. England had received with sympathy the persecuted defender of her Established Church; both at Oxford and in London, flattering distinctions and attentions had been pressed upon him. At the end of October 1751, Mrs Montagu, hearing he was "ill of a sore throat," paid him a visit, which she described in a characteristic letter, pretentious and yet picturesque: "I was obliged," she told Gilbert West, "to pass through all the gay vanities of Mrs Chenevix,[1] and then ascend a most steep and difficult staircase, to get at the little philosopher; this way to wisdom through the vanities and splendid toys of the world, might be prettily allegorized by the pen of the great Bunyan; and the good man himself, to an emblematizing genius, would have afforded an ample subject: his head was enfoncée in a cap of the warmest beaver, made still more respectable by a gold orris; 'a wonderous hieroglyphic robe

[1] The famous toy-woman, in the Strand.

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he wore,'[1] in which was pourtrayed all the attributes of the god Fo, with the arms and achievements of the cham of Tartary. Never did Christian doctor wear such a pagan appearance. . . . When I ceased to look upon him as a missionary, I began to consider him as the best piece of Chinese furniture I had ever seen, and could hardly forbear offering him a place on my chimney-piece. . . ."[2] Sixteen years afterwards, Le Courayer had not yet mastered the English language, as the following epistle[3] will show:

"Dear Madam, I have been informed at Ealing by some of your friends and mine that you abused me without mercy for not writing to you,—and for the discontinuation of a correspondence which was equally agreeable and honourable to me. I expected a kinder treatment from a Lady of so good nature and so good sense, and that you would rather have pity me than abuse me—and that at the example of our Master you would not break a bruised reed, nor quenc a smoaking flax. My silence is my misfortune

[1] A chintz dressing-gown.
[2] *Letters*, iii., 172-3.
[3] Dated from "London, October 11, 1768."

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and not my crime, for how can I help it if by a severe judgment of the Providence upon me I am made unable to do, what you would have me do, and what I would like myself to do. Render me my eyes that I may read and write, and then you'll see whether I am deficient in my duty. . . . The loss is all of my side in not being able to keep your correspondance, and pray don't add to my misfortune in scolding me. . . . Since I am past recovery and I am left to shift for myself, help me to bear my calamity with patience and resignation, and let me like the old Simeon to desire to depart in peace. This is already too long for a blind man, but I hope you will take this as taking leave of writing for the future. I add only my best compliments to Mr Montagu, and wish you a long life, good eyes and a little more good nature for the blind. I am notwithstanding your abuses very sincerely, dear Madam, your affectionate friend and servant for ever and, as said La Fontaine, s'il se peut encore par delà."[1] Whether this blindness was real or imaginary, transient or lasting, the excellent "little Père" lived to the patriarchal

[1] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

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age of ninety-five, and kept his "good spirits and looks" almost to the end.[1]

To pass on to names better known and to later times, Hannah More must be mentioned among Mrs Montagu's frequent correspondents and visitors. Their acquaintance began at the Garricks' in 1773 or 1774,[2] when Hannah More, then about thirty, first came from Bristol to London in quest of literary successes. She met with great encouragement; thanks to Garrick's patronage, her tragedy of *Percy* was accepted at Covent Garden and produced in December 1777. It had "a run of twenty-one nights." Mrs Montagu was warm in her congratulations: "No one can more sincerely rejoice in the triumph of last night than myself," she wrote on 11th December. "I have had such a pain in my face as has obliged me to be muffled up for these six weeks, but I am getting better, and have sent to the box-keeper for boxes for your third and sixth night, and hope also to attend the ninth, though I dare not make so distant an engagement with precarious health." On the ninth night

[1] He died in 1776.

[2] *Memoirs of Hannah More*, i., 47.

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of *Percy*, "Mrs Montagu had a box again; which, as she is so consummate a critic," Hannah More remarked, "and is hardly ever seen at a public place, is a great credit to the play."[1] The best sketches we possess of the dinners and breakfasts in Hill Street or Portman Square are due, as we have seen, to the pen of Hannah More, who, in 1784, also recorded a visit to Sandleford: "The fortnight I spent with our friend Mrs Montagu," she wrote to Mrs Boscawen, "I need not say to you, my dear madam, was passed profitably and pleasantly; as one may say of her what Johnson has said of somebody else, that 'she never opens her mouth but to say *something*.' The Primate of Ireland[2] and Sir William Robinson were at Sandleford for the first three or four days after I got thither. I was a little afraid of his Grace at first, as he carries a dignity you know, in his person and *abord*, which excites more respect than is quite consistent with one's ease; but he laid aside his terrors, and was all graciousness and

[1] *Memoirs of Hannah More*, i., 123, 127.

[2] The Most Reverend Richard Robinson, D.D., Archbishop of Armagh and 1st Lord Rokeby. He was a cousin of Mrs Montagu's.

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complacency, and condescended to join in the favourite subjects of the two ladies, poetry and criticism. . . ."[1] As years went on, however, plays and literature proper gave place, in Hannah More's mind, to religion and morals. Already, in 1785, she had seen and read "Mr Paley's book on *Moral and Political Philosophy*," and thus commented upon it in a letter to Mrs Montagu: "I think it admirable as far as I have gone, full of striking tho' obvious truths, coming home to the business and interests of each individual reader, and free from that sophistical twist so common in metaphysical enquiries. I stumbled a little at the threshold, because I thought the gentleman 'did protest too much,' however, I recovered myself as I went along, for I found that he 'kept his word' and abounds more in sense and truth than any author I have lately read."[2] The influence of such friends as John Newton and William Wilberforce, the indignation that she felt at the atrocities of the "Reign of Terror" in France, the dread of the possible consequences of a revolutionary propaganda in England, made her a strict

[1] *Memoirs of Hannah More*, i., 328-9.
[2] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

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Evangelical in doctrine and an active pamphleteer on the side of government and order. She scattered broadcast through the land small tracts like her *Village Politics by Will Chip* that reached an immense public of all classes. In an interesting letter, probably written in 1794, she explained her motives to Mrs Montagu: "I have been so long accustomed," she said, "to receive favour, kindness and assistance from you on every occasion, that I am encouraged to recommend the enclosed little plan to your patronage. . . . It is not one of the wild theories for which this age is so famous, but the fruit of real experience. I have long seen and lamented the evil it is proposed to counteract. In all the villages I know, it is surprising to see with what impatience the periodical visit of the hawker is expected, and with what avidity his poison is swallowed. You would be diverted at the immense quantity of trash I have collected; even those papers that are written with better intentions are in general calculated to do more harm than good, consisting chiefly of ghosts, dreams, visions, witches and devils. When we consider the zeal with which the writings of Priestley,

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etc., are now brought within the compass of penny books, circulated with great industry, and even translated into Welsh, I begin to fear that *our* workmen and porters will become *philosophers* too, and that an endeavour to mend the morals and the principles of the poor is the most probable method to preserve us from the crimes and calamities of France. In this view, I am not above becoming the compiler and composer of halfpenny papers. If, my dear Madam, any impressive story falls in your way, pray treasure it up for me."[1] Such were the plan and intention of Hannah More's *Cheap Repository* of anti-revolutionary literature for the people; it unquestionably helped to strengthen the reactionary movement that characterised English politics at the end of the eighteenth century.

Contemporary with the success of *Percy* was that of Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, a novel which took the Town by storm in January 1778. On a Tuesday morning in the following September, the author being then with Mrs Thrale at Streatham was asked by her hostess if she "did not want to see Mrs

[1] From Mr Broadley's MSS. Cf. about this undertaking *Hannah More's Memoirs*, ii., 424-6.

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Montagu?"—"I truly said," Miss Burney has noted in her *Diary*,[1] "I should be the most insensible of all animals, not to like to see our sex's glory." For Mrs Montagu had now reached the summit of her influence and fame; her *Essay on Shakespeare* had been translated into French the year before, and everybody in London knew that she was "building a most superb house." She was a power before whom a humble and timid *débutante* like Fanny Burney must silently bow. "A woman of such celebrity in the literary world," the Diarist said to herself, "would be the last I should covet to converse with, though one of the first I should wish to listen to." About one o'clock the next day, the expected guest made her appearance, accompanied by Miss Gregory: "She is middle-sized, very thin, and looks infirm," Miss Burney remarked; "she has a sensible and penetrating countenance, and the air and manner of a woman accustomed to being distinguished, and of great parts." At dinner the conversation lacked brilliancy, in spite of the presence of such luminaries as Mrs Montagu and Dr Johnson himself;

[1] Vol. i., ed. 1876, p. 61 *seq.*

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but the lady-critic had not yet read *Evelina*, nay, did not discover the anonymous writer of it in the person of Miss Burney, till the secret was revealed by the eager Mrs Thrale. That novel never became one of Mrs Montagu's favourites; "she was amazed," she told Mrs Thrale,[1] "that so delicate a girl could write so boisterous a book"; to the "vulgarity" of its Captain Mirvan, Madame Duval and Branghtons, she much preferred the pompousness of *Cecilia* and its Delviles. In a letter to the Dowager Duchess of Portland, she recommended the new work to her Grace's attention, and "old Mrs Delany," the Duchess's intimate friend, was "forced to begin it," Sir Joshua Reynolds informed Fanny, "though she had said she should never read any more; however, when we met, she was reading it already for the third time."[2] It is well known that, in 1785, Miss Burney went to live with Mrs Delany at St James's Place, and in November followed her to Windsor, where, on the Duchess's death, the King had presented her with a house. A message from Mrs Montagu

[1] *Diary*, vol. i., ed. 1876, p. 325.
[2] *Ibid.*, 471.

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to Miss Burney, dated 16th December, announced the arrival of a "basket of game" and also lamented the "misfortune" which the Duchess's friends, Mrs Delany above all, had suffered in losing her.[1] Fanny's reply, now published for the first time, fills a gap in the *Diary*:

"Windsor, December 20th 1785. — Dear Madam, I am quite at a loss what thanks to return for the repast, equally rich and elegant, with which you have at once mentally and substantially regaled us:—*Us*, permit me to say, for here I may aspire at coupling myself with Mrs Delany, since we have participated in both the entertainments, and participate in the grateful acknowledgments we entreat you to accept.—Are you angry?—No, dear Madam, you cannot be angry that I communicated to Mrs Delany a letter that could not but be soothing and consolatory to her. Acute as her sorrow has been, and deep as it must ever remain, she bore it from the first with patience and resignation, and she now diminishes it all she can by receiving in good part such comfort and relief as her surviving friends can afford her. Could I,

[1] *Diary*, ii., 51-3.

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knowing this, withhold from her such a solace as sympathising kindness from Mrs Montagu? especially as it cannot be said to open the wound afresh, for the wound, alas, has never been closed.

"That the *Sting* of Death is Sin, is most truly observed, and I had the pleasure to see a smile of satisfaction brighten her benignant countenance, when she considered, from your stating it, how happily it was here applied.

"I am sorry—I had almost said *surprised*—at dear Mrs Vesey's continued regret:[1] but a heart so much framed for tenderness weighs not always the full value of what excites it, and where there is too much kindness for discrimination, the scentless 'gaudy flower' or the permanent 'reviving aromatic' seem

[1] She had lost her husband in the beginning of the preceding June. Cf. this passage of a letter by Hannah More, already quoted above, p. 236: "21 May 1785. . . . I wish I could say something decisive of poor Vesey; I this moment called there in order to give you the latest information; he is too ill to recover and not ill enough to die; at least not soon I fear, and if *he* does not die, *she* will, for her poor spirits will not long endure to be so harrassed. . . . She, poor dear [soul], forgetting all his offences and malefactions, endures the bitterest sorrow, and eats and sleeps very little. His accounts for both worlds, I fear, are unsettled!"

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to have an equal claim upon the affections, however wide the difference of their desert.

"The beneficence of their Majesties, and its happy effect upon their venerable Protégée would almost make Loyalists of Rebels, if witnessed in its munificent rise, and most tenderly delicate progress. I am much concerned in being the messenger of such ill news as their having to-day a new and severe alarm for the Princess Elizabeth. Sir George Baker had taken leave of her Royal Highness for three days, but she had so bad a night, that he was hastily sent for again this morning. She is now however better, and Hope once more is trying to gain the field from Apprehension.

"The happy party[1] who will have the honour to dine to-morrow in Portman Square, will meet, I hope, many times more;—in common benevolence I must hope it for their sakes, but I draw an [? inference] to myself that makes me hope it, also, from [some] motive more interested.

[1] Mrs Montagu had written (*Diary*, ii., p. 53): "I have solicited Dr Burney to meet some of his friends at dinner here on Wednesday."

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"Mrs Delany charges me to present you her kindest compliments, and best thanks for your partial expressions in her favour,—such *she* thinks them, who feels not that all praise is but the just tribute of her worth. She says, too, that the moor game was the best she ever tasted, and gave her an appetite.

"May I take the liberty of desiring my very best compliments to Mr and Mrs Matthew Montagu[1] and to hope they will accept my best and *prognosticating* wishes for their happiness? I have the honour to be, etc. . . ."[2]

From the domestic freedom of Mrs Delany's house, Miss Burney passed, as we know, to a "wearisome life of attendance and dependence" at Queen's Lodge, where she spent five years in the official capacity of "Second Keeper of the Robes" and subordinate to Mrs Schwellenberg. She seldom met with Mrs Montagu during that time. But, her liberty once regained, in the interval between her departure from Windsor in July

[1] Mrs Montagu's adopted son and her daughter-in-law, who had been married in July.

[2] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

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1791 and her marriage with M. d'Arblay in July 1793, she and her father were frequently invited to Portman Square and welcomed with extreme courtesy by the "unaffectedly agreeable" Mrs Montagu.[1]

In the summer of 1787, Miss Burney had "an appointment" with Dr Beattie, the once celebrated author of the *Minstrel* and of the *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*.[2] She found him "pleasant, unassuming, and full of conversible intelligence, with a round, thick, clunch figure, that promises nothing either of his works or his discourse; yet his eye, at intervals, and when something breaks from him pointed and sudden, shoots forth a ray of genius that instantly lights up his whole countenance. His voice and his manners are particularly and pleasingly mild, and seem to announce an urbanity of character both inviting and edifying."[3] The very respectable, but flaccid, poet and philosopher thus described had indirectly made Mrs Montagu's acquaintance through Dr

[1] Cf. above pp. 218-9, and *Diary*, iii., 382, 408-9.

[2] Published the latter in 1770, the former in 1771 (first canto).

[3] *Diary*, ii., 376.

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Gregory, Dorothea's father. Is it necessary to add that he entertained the highest regard for her, even before he knew her personally? "I have heard much of that lady," he wrote so early as 1767,[1] "and I admire her as an honour to her sex and to human nature." When the first canto of the *Minstrel* came out in 1771, it was sent by Dr Gregory to Mrs Montagu, who communicated it to Lord Lyttelton. A most enthusiastic appreciation was the result: "I read your *Minstrel* last night," Lord Lyttelton wrote on 8th March, "with as much rapture as poetry, in her noblest, sweetest charms, ever raised in my soul. It seemed to me, that my once most beloved minstrel, Thomson, was come down from heaven, refined by the converse of purer spirits than those he lived with here, to let me hear him sing again the beauties of nature, and the finest feelings of virtue, not with human, but with angelic strains." On receiving this devout eulogy, Mrs Montagu hastened to forward it on, through Dr Gregory, to Beattie, and to mention, not only her own opinion of the poem, but also the pains she

[1] *The Life and Writings of James Beattie*, by Sir WILLIAM FORBES, ed. 1807, i., 122.

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was taking to circulate both the *Minstrel* and the *Essay on Truth*: "I have enclosed a note," she said, "by which you will see how much it pleased Lord Lyttelton. I have sent one into the country to Lord Chatham; and I wrote immediately to a person who serves many gentlemen and ladies with new books, to recommend it to all people of taste. I am very sorry the second edition of Dr Beattie's book[1] is not yet in town. I have recommended it, too, to many of our bishops, and others; but all have complained this whole winter, that the booksellers deny having any of either the first or second edition. I wish you would intimate this to Dr Beattie. I dare say many hundreds would have been sold, if people could have got them."[2] This passage shows what precious services Mrs Montagu's social influence enabled her to render to her favourite writers. She occasionally tendered to them direct pecuniary assistance. In 1773, Dr Beattie, provided with an introduction to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Dartmouth,

[1] *I.e.*, of the *Essay on Truth*, which edition appeared in 1771, just before the *Minstrel*.

[2] *Life of Beattie*, i., 249-52.

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came to London, with a view to obtaining a pension from Lord North or from the King. The negotiations, successful in the end, were protracted to a tedious length, and, in the interval of suspense, Mrs Montagu, not content with putting forth her best endeavours in the poet's cause, "told him in very explicit, though delicate, terms, that, if government did nothing, she would herself claim the honour of rendering his situation in life more comfortable."[1] For this generous proposal, which the king's bounty made superfluous, Beattie expressed himself obliged and grateful. In 1784, a new edition of the *Minstrel* being wanted, he offered to Mrs Montagu the dedication of it, and, as "another favour," asked leave to insert her name in the last stanza of the first canto: "I had not the honour to be known to you," he said, "when I published that first book; and, intending to put the name of a friend in the last stanza, but being then undetermined with respect to the person, I left in one of the lines a blank space, which has been continued in all the editions. That blank, with your permission, shall now

[1] *Life of Beattie*, i., 337.

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be filled up; and then the stanza will run thus:

Here pause, my Gothic lyre, a little while;
The leisure hour is all that thou canst claim:
But on this verse if Montagu should smile,
New lays ere long shall animate thy frame:
And her applause to me is more than fame,
For still with truth accords her taste refined.
At lucre or renown let others aim;
I only wish to please the gentle mind,
Whom nature's charms inspire, and love of human kind.

"It would give me no little pleasure to see in the same poem the names of Mrs Montagu and Dr Gregory;[1] two persons so dear to me, and who had so sincere a friendship for one another. Besides, Madam, I beg leave to put you in mind that the first book of the poem was published at his desire, and the second at yours. So that I have more reasons than one for making this request. . . ."[2] It was granted, and Mrs Montagu's name still enjoys what credit there is in being mentioned in the feeble conclusion of a poem, then in vogue and now justly neglected. Fifteen years afterwards, on hearing a premature report of

[1] At the end of the second canto, first published in 1774 (cf. *Life of Beattie*, ii., 43).
[2] *Ibid.*, 313-5.

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her death, Beattie wrote to a friend in a tone of sincere grief: "'I have known several ladies eminent in literature," he declared, "but she excelled them all; and in conversation she had more *wit* than any other person, male or female, whom I have ever known. These, however, were her slighter accomplishments: what was infinitely more to her honour, she was a sincere Christian, both in faith and in practice. . . . I knew her husband, who died in extreme old age, in the year 1775, and by her desire had conferences with him on the subject of Christianity; but, to her great concern, he set too much value on mathematical evidence, and piqued himself too much on his knowledge in that science."[1] Alas! that her arch-enemy, Voltaire, should have perverted a friend so near and dear to her!

With Burke, as with Beattie, she was acquainted almost from the beginning of his literary career in London. She mentioned him, in December 1758, as "a young lawyer by profession, tho' an author by practice, for he wrote," she said, "Natural History

[1] *Life of Beattie*, iii., 162-3.

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preferable to Artificial,"[1] and, a few weeks afterwards, she praised his treatise on the *Sublime and Beautiful* in the following passage of a letter to Mrs Carter: "I do not know that you will always subscribe to his system, but I think you will find him an elegant and ingenious writer. He is far from the pert pedantry and assuming ignorance of modern witlings; but in conversation and writing, an ingenious and ingenuous man, modest and delicate, and, on great and serious subjects, full of that respect and veneration which a good mind and a great one is sure to feel, while fools rush behind the altar at which wise men kneel and pay mysterious reverence."[2] At that time, Burke's thoughts were already turning from literature towards commerce and politics; destitute of private means, and able to earn only a poor pittance by his pen, he eagerly wished for some post in the public service: "The Consulship of Madrid has been vacant for several months," he wrote to Mrs Montagu on 24th September 1759; "I am informed that it is in the

[1] This was the ironical *Vindication of Natural Society*, published in 1756. Cf. Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 156.

[2] *Letters of Mrs Montagu*, ed. 1813, iv., 211.

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gift of Mr Secretary Pitt, and that it is valuable. I presume, however, that it is not an object for a person who has any considerable pretensions, by its having continued so long vacant, else I should never have thought of it. My interest is weak, I have not at all the honour of being known to Mr Pitt; nor much to any of his close connections. For which reason I venture to ask your advice whether I can with propriety proceed at all in this affair, and if you think I ought to undertake it, in what manner it would be proper for me to proceed. . . . It occurred to me that a letter from you to Miss Pitt[1] might be of great service to me. I thought, too, of mentioning Mrs Boscawen. . . ."[2] But Mrs Montagu would not interfere, as she had "no influence on Ministers of State," and the project was abandoned. Burke stayed in England, entered Parliament in 1765, soon to become one of the most famous orators and political writers of his day. His intercourse with Mrs Montagu

[1] Miss Anne Pitt, the Minister's sister, and a friend of Mrs Montagu's.

[2] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 170.

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remained as cordial as before. She occasionally visited him at Beaconsfield: "It was with great pleasure," she was told on 24th July 1771, that "Mrs Burke and I received your letter. Instead of a phenix, a bird or two whom I am neither naturalist or musician enough to know, and who sing to the harvest, shall tell the woods of Beconsfield the honour you do them by this visit. We are very happy that your leisure permits you to see us, and that your health permits you to do it with convenience and pleasure to yourself. Your letter gave very sincere pleasure here; for in truth I felt much pain in seeing you almost the whole winter in a very bad state of health. Thanks to Providence and Tunbridge Waters! We have nothing so unlucky on Monday as to prevent our seeing you and our excellent friends, Mrs Vesey and Mrs Handcock,[1] and we can lodge you without difficulty. I think this part of the country pleasant, and we shall have particular pleasure in showing it to you."[2] As a generous return for these attentions, Mrs Montagu, hearing in 1776

[1] Mrs Vesey's sister-in-law by her first marriage.
[2] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

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that some of Burke's friends "in the City meant to start him for the vacant Chamberlainship," immediately offered herself as one of the sureties necessary for the appointment. Their "total amount was then £40,000."[1] Either in Hill Street or in Portman Square, the great orator's presence was eagerly courted. But his absences became more and more frequent as time went on. He had "more powerful avocations," Wraxall observes, "and aspired to other honours and emoluments than those which mere literary distinction could bestow on him."[2] "The demon of politics committed a robbery on me," Mrs Montagu complained to Mrs Vesey,[3] "when he stole Mr Burke from me; there never was so pleasant, so instructive a companion and so amiable a friend; my love and gratitude to him will always remain, and I hope sometimes he will bestow an hour at Portman Square." When the fall of the Coalition Ministry had freed him from the cares of office, he did reappear there: in

[1] *Life of Burke*, by Sir JAMES PRIOR, ed. Bohn's Libraries, 1891, p. 164.

[2] WRAXALL'S *Historical Memoirs*, ed. 1904, p. 97.

[3] On 9th December 1784—from Mrs Climenson's collection.

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April 1790, Hannah More congratulated herself on having "met at Mrs Montagu's Mr Burke and a pleasant party; indeed," she added, "he is a sufficiently pleasant party of himself."[1]

To close our list by the name of the most valued and most redoubted guest, we must now speak of Dr Johnson. His intercourse with Mrs Montagu was at first of a very courteous and amiable kind. He applied to her for help to the distressed, for subscriptions to Mrs Williams's *Miscellany* or to Mrs Ogle's benefit,[2] and was never refused. In her high-flown, complimentary style, she asked him to her entertainments in Hill Street. "The whole party was engaged to dine at Mrs Montagu's," Miss Burney wrote in March 1777.[3] Dr Johnson said he had received the most flattering note he had ever read, or that anybody else had ever read, by way of invitation.—"Well! so have I too," cried Mrs Thrale; "so if a note from Mrs Montagu is to be boasted of, I beg mine may not be forgot."—"*Your* note," cried Dr Johnson,

[1] *Memoirs*, ii., 225.
[2] See Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 161, 173 (1759).
[3] *Early Diary*, ed. 1889, ii., 157 (to Crisp).

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"can bear no comparison with *mine*; I am *at the head of the Philosophers*, she says."—"And I," cried Mrs Thrale, "*have all the Muses in my train!*"—"A fair battle," said Dr Burney. "Come, compliment for compliment, and see who will hold out longest."—"Oh! I am afraid for Mrs Thrale," cried Mr Seward; "for I know Mrs Montagu exerts all her forces, when she attacks Dr Johnson."—"Oh, yes!" said Mrs Thrale, "she has often, I know, flattered *him*, till he has been ready to faint." To such distinguished regard, however, Johnson was by no means insensible. In Dr Maxwell's Recollections of him, we read how "one evening at Mrs Montagu's, where a splendid company was assembled, consisting of the most eminent literary characters, he seemed highly pleased with the respect and attention that were shown him. On our return home," Maxwell continues, "I asked him if he was not highly *gratified* by his visit: 'No, Sir,' said he, 'not highly *gratified*; yet I do not recollect to have passed many evenings *with fewer objections*.'"[1] He could

[1] Quoted in BOSWELL'S *Johnson*, Globe ed., 1894, p. 218 (about 1770).

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even pay the lady in kind, as this poetical inscription "on her bust" will show:

"Had this fair figure, which this frame displays
Adorn'd in Roman time the brightest days,
In every dome, in every sacred place,
Her statue would have breath'd an added grace,
And on its basis would have been enroll'd:
This is Minerva cast in virtue's mould."[1]

And he proved as polite in prose as in verse: "Madam," he wrote on Thursday, 21st December 1775, "I know not when any letter has given me so much pleasure or vexation as that which I had yesterday the honour of receiving. That you, Madam, should wish for my company, is surely a sufficient reason for being pleased; that I should delay twice, what I had so little right to expect even once, has so bad an appearance, that I can only hope to have it thought, that I am ashamed.—You have kindly allowed me to name a day. Will you be pleased, Madam, to accept of me any day after Tuesday? Till I am favoured with your answer, or despair of so much condescension, I shall suffer no engagement to fasten itself upon me."[2] In

[1] *Poems of Dr Johnson* in Chalmers's *English Poets*, 1810, xvi. 609.

[2] From Mr Broadley's MSS.

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penning this elegant and ceremonious apology, Johnson evidently remembered that he was addressing her, whom he considered as "the first woman for literary knowledge in England, and, if in England, in the world."[1]

But, in January 1781, a sudden and terrific storm burst, that rent their bonds of friendship in twain. The Doctor, an uncompromising critic, published a *Life of Lord Lyttelton*,[2] in which he said of the latter's *Poems* that "they have nothing to be despised, but little to be admired," and of the *Dialogues of the Dead* that, when they first appeared, "they were kindly commended by the 'Critical Reviewers'; and *poor* Lyttelton, with humble gratitude, returned, in a note, acknowledgments which can never be proper, since they must be paid either for flattery or for justice." This patronising, almost contemptuous, tone stung to the quick the joint author of the *Dialogues*. "Mrs Montagu and Mr Pepys,[3]

[1] Miss BURNEY'S *Diary*, ed. 1876, i., 66 (1778).

[2] In the second series of *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the most eminent of the English Poets* (1780).

[3] Sir William Weller Pepys (1740-1825), Master in Chancery and a well-known figure in the literary circles of the metropolis: see about him Miss GAUSSEN'S *Later Pepys*, 1904. Sir Lucas Pepys, physician to George III., was his brother.

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his Lordship's two chief surviving friends, are very angry," Hannah More tells us,[1] and Horace Walpole, in his more picturesque style, informed Mason, on 27th January, that "Mrs Montagu and all her Mœnades intended to tear Johnson limb from limb, for despising their moppet, Lord Lyttelton."[2] She partly obtained her revenge, by inciting Robert Potter, a Norfolk schoolmaster and translator of Euripides, to undertake a defence of Gray against the critic. "It is sensibly written," Walpole remarked about this work, "is civil to Johnson, and yet severe. . . . I have heard that the true object was to revenge the attack on Lord Lyttelton, at the instigation of Mrs Montagu, who has her full share of incense."[3] Pepys it was who suffered most in this contest of rival powers.

[1] *Memoirs*, i. 207.

[2] *Letters*, ed. Paget Toynbee, 1904, xi., 376.

[3] *Ibid.*, xiii., 5 (9th June 1783). Potter was amply rewarded for his trouble: see a letter from him to Mrs Montagu, dated from "The Close, Norwich, 3rd July 1789: Madam,—Last summer you did me the honour to congratulate me on my unexpected promotion to a Prebendal Stall in this Church; I am now drawing upon you for your further congratulations on a similar occasion. On the 25th of the last month, the Bishop of Norwich came to my house, and of his own free grace offered me

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On a Wednesday in June 1781, he happened to dine at Mrs Thrale's in Johnson's company, and the blunt old Doctor fell foul of him in characteristic fashion. Miss Burney shall relate the scene to us, as she did, two years after the event, at Mrs Vesey's: "I never saw Dr Johnson really in a passion but then: and dreadful, indeed, it was to see. He so red, poor Mr Pepys so pale!"—"But how did it begin? What did he say?"—"Oh, Dr Johnson came to the point without much ceremony. He called out aloud, before a large company, at dinner, 'What have you to say, sir, to me or of me? Come forth, man! I hear you object to my *Life of Lord Lyttelton*. What are your objections? If you have anything to say, let's hear it. Come forth, man, when I call you!'"—"What a call indeed! Why, then, he fairly bullied him into a quarrel!"—"Yes. And I was the more sorry, because Mr Pepys had begged of me, before they met, not to let Lord Lyttelton be mentioned. Now, I had no

the united vicarages of Lowestoft and Kessingland, to which he collated me the next day; they are at present worth £470 a year, and improving under an Act of Inclosure of a large extent. . . ." (From Mr Broadley's MSS.)

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more power to prevent it than this macaroon cake in my hand."—"It was behaving ill to Mrs Thrale, certainly, to quarrel in her house."—"Yes; but he never repeated it, though he wished of all things to have gone through just such another scene with Mrs Montagu, and to refrain was an act of heroic forbearance."—"Why, I rather wonder he did not; for she was the head of the set of Lytteltonians."—"Oh, he knows that; he calls Mr Pepys only her prime minister."—"And what does he call her?"—"'Queen,' to be sure! 'Queen of the Blues'! She came to Streatham one morning, and I saw he was dying to attack her. But he had made a promise to Mrs Thrale to have no more quarrels in her house, and so he forced himself to forbear. . . ."—"And how did Mrs Montagu herself behave?"—"Very stately, indeed, at first. She turned from him very stiffly, and with a most distant air, and without even curtseying to him, and with a firm intention to keep to what she had publicly declared—that she would never speak to him more! However, he went up to her himself, longing to begin! and very roughly said, 'Well, madam, what's become of your

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fine new house? I hear no more of it.'"—"But how did she bear this?"—"Why, she was obliged to answer him; and she soon grew so frightened—as everybody does—that she was as civil as ever. . . . But Dr Johnson," Miss Burney concludes, "was now much softened. He had acquainted me, when I saw him last, that he had written to her upon the death of Mrs Williams, because she had allowed her something yearly, which now ceased. . . . 'And I had a very kind answer from her,' said he."[1] We do not know whether, during the year[2] that intervened between this peace-making and Johnson's death, he was invited to Portman Square. But it seems probable, as Wraxall remarks, that his disappearance, at whatever time it may have occurred, took much from "the charm and the impulse" that propelled Mrs Montagu's dinners as well as her assemblies, and that, after his decease in 1784, "it became impossible to supply his place."[3]

[1] *Diary*, i., 547-9; cf. *Ibid.*, 354-7.

[2] Mrs Williams died in August 1783.

[3] *Historical Memoirs*, ed. 1904, pp. 96-7. It is almost superfluous to add that many foreigners also corresponded with, and were invited by, Mrs Montagu. To give only one instance, Letourneur, the translator of Shakespeare,

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III

The picture of the collective life at such assemblies would indeed be pleasant to make, if only we possessed documents sufficiently numerous and illuminating on the subject. A mere passing glance, however, is all that Mme d'Arblay's *Memoirs of Dr Burney*[1] affords us: "At Mrs Montagu's," she writes in her comparative account of "Bas-Bleu Societies," "the semi-circle that faced the fire retained during the whole evening its unbroken form, with a precision that made it seem described by a Brobdignagian compass.

sent her the curious note that follows: "Paris, 15 janvier 1777.—Madame, I shall not trouble yourself to day with any other request but with my humble prayer to be so kind as to order the inclosed Letter to M. Catuelan be rendered to him, if possible and if you know of his adress in your City. There are two months and more, since I have no news of him, and it wou'd be essential for me to get an answer from him. I hope he kept not the incognito in London for you. . . . The war is open between Shakespeare and Voltaire, and the first has got many champions whom I never sought for: but Shakespeare is good for defending himself. I am, etc. . . . *P.S.*—M. Franklin is here much speaking of the Electricity." (From Mrs Climenson's MSS.) A rather poor testimonial for a translator of Shakespeare!

[1] Ed. 1832, ii., 270-2.

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The lady of the castle commonly placed herself at the upper end of the room, near the commencement of the curve, so as to be courteously visible to all her guests; having the person of the highest rank, or consequence, properly on one side, and the person the most eminent for talents, sagaciously on the other, or as near to her chair and her converse as her favouring eye and a complacent bow of the head could invite him to that distinction. Her conversational powers were of a truly superior order: strong, just, clear, and often eloquent. Her process in argument, notwithstanding an earnest solicitude for pre-eminence, was uniformly polite and candid. But her reputation for wit seemed always in her thoughts, marring their natural flow and untutored expression. No sudden start of talent urged forth any precarious opinion; no vivacious new idea varied her logical course of ratiocination. Her smile, though most generally benignant, was rarely gay; and her liveliest sallies had a something of anxiety rather than of hilarity, — till their success was ascertained by applause. Her form was stately, and her manners were dignified. Her face retained strong remains

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of beauty throughout life; and though its native cast was evidently that of severity, its expression was softened off in discourse by an almost constant desire to please." Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, who first knew her in December 1776,[1] corroborates Mme d'Arblay's testimony: "Mrs Montagu," he says, "was accustomed to open her house to a large company of both sexes, whom she frequently entertained at dinner. A service of plate, and a table plentifully covered, disposed her guests to admire the splendour of her fortune, not less than the lustre of her talents." Though she then verged, he goes

[1] His first book, *Cursory Remarks made in a Tour through some of the Northern Parts of Europe*, had appeared in 1775, and, on 1st December 1776, he thus introduced himself to Mrs Montagu: "I feel myself too highly honoured in Mrs Montagu's permission to present to her my present work, not to seize the earliest occasion of laying it at her feet, though my diffidence at appearing in such a presence almost restrains me from availing myself of her goodness. To recommend it to her candour, and to request her indulgence for its faults, is, I know, unnecessary. Though her judgment will oblige her to see, her generosity of mind will induce her to conceal its blemishes and errors. They are too numerous to escape her penetration, and I am obliged to take shelter from the superiority of her understanding in the beneficence of her heart . . ." (From Mr Broadley's MSS.)

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on, "towards her sixtieth year, her person, which was thin, spare, and in good preservation, gave her an appearance of less antiquity. All the lines of her countenance bespoke intelligence, and her eyes were accommodated to her cast of features, which had in them something satirical and severe, rather than amiable or inviting. She possessed great natural cheerfulness, and a flow of animal spirits; loved to talk, and talked well on almost every subject; led the conversation, and was qualified to preside in her circle, whatever subject of discourse was started: but her manner was more dictatorial and sententious, than conciliating or diffident. There was nothing feminine about her; and though her opinions were usually just, as well as delivered in language suited to give them force, yet the organ which conveyed them was not musical."[1] She claimed the leadership in the "semi-circle" of her guests; she "reasoned and harangued"[2] at great length; for, as we know, she loved the sound of her own voice too well.[3]

[1] *Historical Memoirs*, pp. 85-6.
[2] As Miss Burney says, *Diary*, i., 239.
[3] Cf. above, pp. 27 *seq.*

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The "Blue Stocking" parties at her house or at Mrs Vesey's, whatever their imperfections, possessed the double merit of novelty and usefulness. They answered a social need of the time. With the progress and diffusion of knowledge, women—at least the best educated among them—were becoming desirous of intellectual converse with men. They suffered from the injurious isolation and neglect to which, even in drawing-rooms, they were often consigned. They felt almost affronted, when "scholars and authors" seemed to shun them. "As if the two sexes had been in a state of war," Mrs Carter wrote on one such occasion, "the gentlemen ranged themselves on one side of the room, where they talked their own talk, and left us poor ladies to twirl our shuttles, and amuse each other, by conversing as we could. By what little I could overhear, our opposites were discoursing on the old English poets, and this subject did not seem so much beyond a female capacity, but that we might have been indulged with a share in it."[1] When, at Mrs Montagu's table or in her "room of

[1] *Letters from Mrs Elizabeth Carter to Mrs Montagu*, ed. 1817, iii., 68 (May 1778).

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Cupidons," Johnson, Burke, Richard Owen Cambridge, Hannah More, Miss Burney, Mrs Carter herself, were assembled together, they could freely discuss such topics as interested them all. Neither were they compelled unwillingly to pore on packs of cards, as happened in so many other London houses, where permission to enter and take a seat was bought at twelve pence,[1] in fees to the servants. With righteous indignation, Hannah More condemns this scandalous practice of "card-money," paid as part of their wages to the domestics entrusted with the care of "furnishing the implements of diversion for the guests of their masters."[2] What intelligent conversation could be started, when, around a table, all eyes were gazing at trumps or honours, when money was lost and won, sometimes by hundreds of pounds? In a sprightly poem entitled *The Bas Bleu*,[3] the same Hannah More exclaims, in praise

[1] See HORACE WALPOLE'S *Letters*, ed. Toynbee, ii. 117 (1745).

[2] *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*, 1798 (*Works*, ed. 1853, ii., 251).

[3] It was read in MS. by Pepys to a party at his house, so early as November 1783; but did not appear before 1786.

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of the learned ladies that had banished cards and gambling from their drawing-rooms:

"Long was society o'er-run
By whist, that desolating Hun;
Long did quadrille despotic sit,
That Vandal of colloquial wit;
And conversation's setting light
Lay half-obscur'd in Gothic night;
At length the mental shades decline,
Colloquial wit begins to shine;
Genius prevails, and conversation
Emerges into *reformation.*
The vanquish'd triple crown to you
Boscawen sage, bright Montagu,
Divided fell;—your cares in haste
Rescued the ravag'd realms of taste;
And Lyttelton's accomplish'd name,
And witty Pulteney shar'd the fame;
The men, not bound by pedant rules,
Nor ladies *précieuses ridicules*:
For polish'd Walpole shew'd the way,
How wits may be both learn'd and gay;
And Carter taught the female train,
The deeply wise are never vain;
And she, who Shakespeare's wrongs redrest,
Prov'd that the brightest are the best. . . ."[1]

That the example and efforts of this little band of "reformers" contributed to raise the tone and to refine the manners of the

[1] *Works*, ed. 1853, v., 316-7.

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higher circles in the metropolis, seems to us unquestionable.

A writer on Mrs Montagu, "the Queen of the Blues," will probably be expected to throw some light on the origin of that curious phrase, the "Bas Bleus" or "Blue Stockings." To our great concern, though we have searched deep for it, the solution of the problem still eludes us. Some will have it that "calze turchine" were first gaily flaunted in Venice at the time of the Renaissance; others maintain that they came direct from France as an eighteenth-century "article de Paris."[1] We cannot assent to this foreign view of the matter. With all his contemporaries, we firmly believe—but cannot demonstrate—that one of the wisest men in his generation, a poet, philosopher, musician, and naturalist, called Benjamin Stillingfleet,[2] was the involuntary cause of this appellation. The disinherited grandson of the once famous Bishop of Worcester, he had early learnt in the school of poverty and

[1] See *The Quarterly Review* for January 1903, pp. 68-9. Mrs Climenson's remarks, ii., 98, are based on a misquotation of a passage in Miss Gaussen's *Later Pepys*, i., 43.

[2] Cf. *The Literary Life and Select Works* of B. S., 2 vols., London, 1811.

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dependence a lesson of humility and sadness. He had been a subsizar at Cambridge, a preceptor in a squire's family, and a forsaken lover after a ten years' courtship. The greatest success he could ever boast of in the world was an appointment to the place of "barrack-master at Kensington," worth about £100 a year. "You know not what it is," he once wrote to a friend, "to have ill-health, and therefore I will tell you it is a certain specific for some passions; you know not what it is to be disappointed in every aim in life, which, I must tell you, is another specific for other passions; and, when these passions are gone, there is but very little difference between a prince and a beggar."[1] From his many sorrows, the unambitious, resigned Stillingfleet had taken refuge in the cultivation of his garden, which gave him health, and in the study of botany and harmony, which procured him some pleasure. He was often seen at Bath or about town, doubtless stooping in his gait and plunged in his mildly pessimistic thoughts. His accomplishments as a scholar

[1] Cf. *The Literary Life and Select Works* of B. S., vol. i., p. 101.

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and a wit made him a favourite with Mrs Montagu[1] and the other learned ladies. One day, about 1750, he was at Bath, and received an invitation to "a literary meeting at Mrs Vesey's." He "declined to accept it," Mme d'Arblay informs us, "from not being, he said, in the habit of displaying a proper equipment for an evening assembly. 'Pho, pho,' cried Mrs Vesey, with her well-known, yet always original simplicity, while she looked inquisitively at him and his accoutrement, 'don't mind dress! Come in your blue stockings!' With which words, humorously repeating them as he entered the apartment of the chosen coterie, Mr Stillingfleet claimed permission to appear according to order. And those words ever after were fixed in playful stigma upon Mrs Vesey's associations."[2] It seems a confirmation of this account that, on 13th November 1756, a friend of Mrs Montagu's should write to her that "Monsey," the physician of Chelsea Hospital, "swears he will make out some story of you and Stillingfleet before

[1] She had entrusted him with the care of correcting the proofs of her *Essay* in 1769, cf. above, p. 150.

[2] *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, ed. 1832, ii., 262-3.

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you are much older; you shall not keep blew stockings at Sandleford for nothing."[1] And Mrs Montagu herself, in the following March, having mentioned Stillingfleet in a letter to Monsey, said of him: "I assure you our old philosopher is so much a man of pleasure, he has left off his old friends and his blue stockings, and is at operas and other gay assemblies every night."[2] Stillingfleet and his "blue stockings" therefore became interchangeable terms among his acquaintances. As Boswell observes: "Such was the excellence of his conversation, that his absence was felt as so great a loss that it used to be said: 'We can do nothing without the blue stockings;' and thus by degrees the title was established."[3] Wherever Stillingfleet appeared, *there* were the Blue Stockings. By a very natural process, the name extended from Mrs Vesey's parties to those of Mrs Montagu and others. It even crossed the Channel at the end of the century.[4]

[1] Mrs CLIMENSON, ii., 98.

[2] *Letters*, iv., 117.

[3] *Life of Johnson*, Globe ed., p. 568.

[4] We do not remember that the phrase was ever applied to the parties at Mme du Deffand's, Mlle de Lespinasse's, and Mme Geoffrin's.

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Since the institution and its "title" in all probability originated with Mrs Vesey, it would be unjust to pass her over in silence. She formed a strong contrast with Mrs Montagu[1] in her disposition and manners. She seemed "of imagination all compact," and her friends had affectionately nicknamed her "the Sylph," for, like an "ætherial" being, she lived and thought "in a world of her own." In her actual work-a-day life she was none too happy. Fondly attached to her second husband, Agmondesham Vesey, of Lucan, near Dublin, "for many years a member of the Irish House of Commons and Comptroller and Accountant-General for Ireland,"[2] she had not succeeded in fixing his affections. "He has many amiable qualities," Mrs Carter said in 1774, "and would have many more if he formed his standard of action from his own mind, for I am inclined to think he is not vicious so

[1] Whose friend she was, and who, in 1755, described her as "a very amiable, agreeable woman," with "an easy politeness that gains one in a moment." (*Letters*, iii., 310.)

[2] Preface to the *Letters between Mrs Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot*, ed. 1819, I., xiii. The third volume consists of letters from Mrs Carter to Mrs Vesey.

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much from inclination as from the example of the world. If it was a fashionable thing for wits and scholars and lord-lieutenants and other distinguished personages to be true to their wives, probably our friend would not have found him an unfaithful husband."[1] This disappointment had doubtless enhanced Mrs Vesey's flightiness and her dissatisfaction with the things of this world: "She scarcely ever enjoys any one object," Mrs Carter wrote to Mrs Montagu, "from the apprehension that something better may possibly be found in another. It is really astonishing to see how this restless pursuit counteracts all the feelings of her amiable and affectionate heart. There are few things, I believe, that she loves like you and me; yet, when she is with us, she finds that you and I, not being absolute divinities, have no power of bestowing perfect happiness, and

[1] *Letters from Mrs Carter to Mrs Montagu*, ed. 1817, ii., 296. Cf. this passage of a letter from Mrs Montagu to her sister (1785): " . . . You will be sorry to hear that Mr Vesey has behaved like a wretch to my poor friend. . . . He has left £1000 to his kept mistress, poor recompense to be sure for mortal sin and loathsome habits, but he has shown more regard to his companion in iniquity than to his tender, faithful friend. I will say no more of the Monster, for I cannot think of him with patience. . . ."

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so from us she flies away, to try if it is to be met with at an assembly or an opera."[1] Ever ingenious at difficulties and little distresses, she lived in "a perpetual forecast of disappointment." One day she fancied that she was losing her senses, or else she felt her memory going and her power of expressing herself decreasing. The joys of friendship were spoilt for her by the bitter thought of their transitoriness. "Is it reasonable," Mrs Carter exclaimed on reading her complaints, "to wish to reject the possession of any real good, merely because it may happen not to be a perpetuity?"[2] She had "a mind formed for doubt," she said of herself, and her bias towards scepticism, though undecided, alarmed her pious friends by its intermittent recurrence. "Never listen to the half learning, the perverted understanding, and pert ridicule of French philosophers and beaux esprits, who would persuade you it is best to wander over a wide, stormy ocean without a pilot and without a leading star!" Never take delight, Mrs Carter told her, "in the writings or conversation

[1] *Carter Letters to Mrs Montagu*, ii., 109-10.
[2] *Talbot Letters*, iii., 45.

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of a licentious profligate infidel like the Abbé Raynal," whom Mrs Vesey — and also Mrs Montagu—welcomed to their houses in 1776.[1] In the confusing crowd of fanciful anxieties which her "visionary imagination" conjured up, Mrs Vesey often lost her presence of mind. "With her," says Wraxall, "this forgetfulness extended to such a point, that she sometimes hardly remembered her own name. It will scarcely be credited, that she could declaim against second marriages, to a lady of quality who had been twice married, and though Mr Vesey was her own second husband. When at last reminded of the circumstance, she only exclaimed, 'Bless me, my dear, I had quite forgotten it!'" As Wraxall wisely remarks, "there was some decay of mind in such want of recollection."[2] In fact, after the death of her husband in 1785, Mrs Vesey gradually sank into "a most afflicting state of imbecility."

But she remained to a very late period of her life a delightful being, whom all that knew her loved and petted almost, like a

[1] On his loquacity, see WRAXALL'S *Historical Memoirs*, ed. 1904, p. 94.

[2] *Ibid.*, 87-8.

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favourite child. The "gentleness" of her temper showed itself in her winning ways. "What English heart ever excelled hers?" cried Horace Walpole,[1] once sceptical, but soon converted. In a luminous passage of a letter to Mrs Montagu, Mrs Carter, commenting on the skill with which "the Sylph" conducted her "heterogeneous assemblies," thus explains the secret of her success and charm: "One means by which she preserves so many naturally jarring characters as compose her motley crowd from quarrelling with each other, is by contriving to put them all into perfect good humour with themselves. . . . As, upon these occasions, our Sylph has not a grain of vanity, nor the least degree of merely personal feelings, she has an infinite deal of attention to bestow in adapting herself to the feelings of others; and thus, without any appearance of flattery, of effort, or of design, she accomplishes the point of making each of the individuals with whom her blue room[2]

[1] *Letters*, ed. Paget Toynbee, xiv., 5 (1787).

[2] In Bolton Row, and, after October 1779, in Clarges Street, Piccadilly. With Mrs Boscawen in South Audley Street, Mrs Montagu in Hill Street or Portman Square, and Mrs Carter herself in Clarges Street, the most eminent "Blue Stockings" almost elbowed one another.

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is crowded, consider itself as a principal and distinguished object; and wherever people can imagine themselves to possess the first place, they will always be in wonderful good humour with all the world about them."[1] At her own parties Mrs Montagu, we may remember, claimed for herself "the first place" at the head of the "semi-circle" of her guests. Mrs Vesey, less ambitious, abhorred this cold formality:

> "Th' enchantress wav'd her wand, and spoke!
> Her potent wand the circle broke:"

so wrote the poetess of the *Bas Bleu*,[2] and Mme d'Arblay, in a picturesque page of the *Memoirs of Dr Burney*,[3] has left us a vivid description of the scene: "Mrs Vesey was as mirth-provoking from her oddities and mistakes as Falstaff was wit-inspiring. . . . Her fears were so great of the horror, as it was styled, of a circle, from the ceremony and awe which it produced, that she pushed all the small sofas, as well as chairs, pell-

[1] *Carter Letters*, ii., 184-5 (1772).

[2] *The Works of* HANNAH MORE, ed. 1853, v., 320. For a description of Mrs Vesey's parties between 1781 and 1784, see HANNAH MORE'S *Memoirs*, i., 212, 278, 357, 359.

[3] Ed. 1832 ii., 264-8.

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mell about the apartments, so as not to leave even a zigzag path of communication free from impediment: and her greatest delight was to place the seats back to back, so that those who occupied them could perceive no more of their nearest neighbour than if the parties had been sent into different rooms: an arrangement that could only be eluded by such a twisting of the neck as to threaten the interlocutors with a spasmodic affection.[1] . . . With really lively parts, a fertile imagination, and a pleasant quickness of remark, she had the unguardedness of childhood, joined to an Hibernian bewilderment of ideas that cast her incessantly into some burlesque situation, and incited even the most partial, and even the most sensitive of her own countrymen to relate stories, speeches, and anecdotes of her astonishing self-perplexities, her confusion about times and circumstances, and her inconceivable jumble of recollections between what had happened, or what might have happened; and what had befallen others, that she

[1] Cf., however, Madame d'ARBLAY'S *Diary*, ed. 1876, i., 120: "the chairs are drawn into little parties of three together, in a confused manner, all over the room."

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imagined had befallen herself: that made her name, though it could never be pronounced without personal regard, be constantly coupled with something grotesque. . . . But what most contributed to render the scenes of her social circle nearly dramatic in comic effect, was her deafness. . . . She had commonly two or three or more ear-trumpets hanging to her wrists, or slung about her neck, or tost upon the chimney-piece or table. The instant that any earnestness of countenance or animation of gesture struck her eye, she darted forward trumpet in hand to inquire what was going on,[1] but almost always arrived at the speaker at the moment that he was become, in his turn, the hearer. And after quietly listening some minutes, she would gently utter her disappointment by crying: 'Well, I really thought you were talking of something.' And then, though a whole group would hold it fitting to flock around her, and recount what had been said, if a smile caught her roving eye from

[1] Cf. Mrs Delany (*Autobiography and Correspondence*, vi., 219): "Poor Mrs Vesey is so deaf that, when she is in company, she carries her stool and cushion from one end of the room to the other, to be near those that are engaged in conversation" (1784).

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any opposite direction, the fear of losing something more entertaining would make her beg not to trouble them, and again rush on the gayer talkers. But as a laugh is excited more commonly by sportive nonsense than by wit, she usually gleaned nothing from her change of place and hastened therefore back to ask for the rest of what she had interrupted. But generally finding that set dispersing or dispersed, she would look around her with a forlorn surprise and cry: 'I can't conceive why it is that nobody talks to-night. I can't catch a word.' Yet with all these peculiarities Mrs Vesey was eminently amiable, candid, gentle and even sensible, but she had an ardour to know whatever was going forward and to see whoever was named, that kept her curiosity constantly in a panic, and almost dangerously increased the singular wanderings of her imagination. Here, amongst the few remaining men of letters of the preceding literary era, Dr Burney met Horace Walpole, Owen Cambridge, and Soame Jenyns, who were commonly then denominated the old wits."

The life that the "blue stockings" led,

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within the privileged circle of the nobility or higher gentry,[1] appears to us from a distance as singularly calm and pleasant. It passed, unruffled by any mighty commotion, political or social. When it reached its most brilliant period, "from 1770 to 1785,"[2] the '45 was already forgotten, and the French Revolution yet unforeseen. The echoes of the American War hardly disturbed the peaceful tenour of Mrs Montagu's and of Mrs Vesey's assemblies. Convinced that the foundations of society and of their creed were proof against any assault, they had no cares but those which the course of our every-day life brings to man at all seasons and in all ages. From the anxieties of playing deep and thinking deep, they prudently abstained, and gave the best of their time to the enjoyment of conversation on their favourite subjects: criticism and poetry.

[1] On the "narrow boundaries" of that society, cf. Sir GEORGE TREVELYAN, *The Early History of Ch. J. Fox*, ed. 1901, pp. 68-9.

[2] WRAXALL'S *Historical Memoirs*, ed. 1904, p. 96.

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CONCLUSION

In a passage of his *Historical Memoirs*,[1] Wraxall asks himself whether the "literary society of London," at the period we have been speaking of, "could enter into any competition for extent of talents, and superiority of attainments, with the society of Paris, that met at the apartments of Madame du Deffand, and of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse"; and he is of the opinion "that neither in the period of its duration, nor in the number, merit, or intellectual eminence of the principal members, could the English society be held up on any parity with that of France." There can be no doubt that Wraxall is right in his judgment. The inferiority of the social and literary assemblies in Hill Street or Bolton Row, as compared with those at the "couvent St Joseph" or in the Rues St

[1] Ed. 1904, p. 96.

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Dominique and St Honoré,[1] seems due to several causes, the most important one being perhaps the preference which, at all times, the English have shown for "clubs composed exclusively of men," where "researches of taste and literature constitute" by no means "the basis and the central point of union."[2] In spite of Mrs Montagu's and of Mrs Vesey's exertions, their contemporaries remained addicted to cards and wine. Ever since "Lady Shrewsbury, in Queen Anne's time" first introduced card parties,[3] the life of the aristocracy, during the eighteenth century, appears to us as one long play-day. "What devastations are made by that destructive fury, the spirit of Play!" lamented Lord Lyttelton in 1750. "The time, the fortunes, the honour and the consciences of our nobility and gentry, both male and female, are all falling a prey to it, and, what is still worse, the force of the law has been tried against it, and proves ineffectual."[4] How could a

[1] Respectively the abodes of Mme du Deffand, Mlle de Lespinasse, and Mme Geoffrin.

[2] WRAXALL, *ibid.*, p. 101.

[3] See Lord E. FITZMAURICE'S *Life of Shelburne*, Autobiography, i. 51.

[4] To Doddridge, in PHILLIMORE'S *Life of Lyttelton* p. 421.

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man like Sir John Bland, who in one night successively lost £32,000 and "recovered the greatest part of it,"[1] leave the excitement of gambling for the tameness of the intellectual pleasures to be enjoyed in a set of more or less elderly ladies? "The gaming at Almack's,[2] which has taken the *pas* of White's, is worthy the decline of our Empire," Horace Walpole wrote in 1770. "The young men of the age lose five, ten, fifteen thousand pounds in an evening there. Lord Stavordale,[3] not one-and-twenty, lost eleven thousand there, last Tuesday, but recovered it by one great hand at hazard: he swore a great oath —'Now, if I had been playing *deep*, I might have won millions!'"[4] The recklessness of the Clubs was, to some extent, shared in by the Town: society in those days seemed "one vast casino."[5] In the idleness of fashionable life, gambling proved the easiest and the most fascinating way of killing time. "I came

[1] HORACE WALPOLE'S *Letters*, ed. Toynbee, iii., 228.

[2] Known later on as Brookes's.

[3] Eldest son of Stephen Fox, first Earl of Ilchester and twin brother to Henry Fox, Charles's father.

[4] HORACE WALPOLE'S *Letters*, vii., 365.

[5] Sir GEORGE TREVELYAN'S *Early History of Ch. J. Fox*, ed. 1901, p. 83.

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to town yesterday for a party at Bedford House, made for Princess Emily," Horace Walpole said in 1761. "There was limited loo for the Princess, unlimited for the Duchess of Grafton, a table of quinze, and another of quadrille."[1] Men who, but for this besetting sin, would have been the ornament and delight of their social circle, wasted their fortunes and health in the most futile and exasperating of all pastimes: "Lord Chesterfield has had a stroke of apoplexy," Mrs Delany wrote in 1756. "It is generally thought the anxious life he has led among gamesters has occasioned this stroke. Whatever effect it may have had on his constitution, it is a severe reproach and blemish to his character as a man possessed of superior talents to most of his sex, so good an understanding, such brilliancy of wit, so much discernment in seeing the foibles of others, and when he thought his example of consequence (as when Lord Lieutenant in Ireland), so *great a command* of himself for nearly a whole year! Is it not strange he should at last fall a sacrifice to that desperate vice, gaming?"[2]

[1] *Letters*, v., 62-3.
[2] *Autobiography and Correspondence*, iii. 404-5.

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He recovered, however, and, in 1758, Rigby mentioned him as looking quite well, and saying "he shall not be perfectly so till hazard comes in."[1] To what bitter repentance and cruel embarrassments this passion could lead, we see by the following note[2] from Lord Carlisle to Selwyn, the famous wit: "My dear George, I have undone myself, and it is to no purpose to conceal from you my abominable madness and folly. . . . I never lost so much in five times as I have done to-night, and am in debt to the house[3] for the whole." Wilberforce himself, on entering public life in 1780, sought election at "all the leading clubs." "The first time I was at Brookes's," he says, "scarcely knowing any one, I joined from mere shyness in play at the faro table, where George Selwyn kept bank. A friend who knew my inexperience, and regarded me as a victim decked out for sacrifice, called to me, 'What, Wilberforce, is that you?' Selwyn quite resented the interference

[1] *The Bedford Correspondence*, ed. 1843, ii. 359.

[2] *Circa* July 1776, endorsed by Selwyn "after the loss of the £10,000"; see JESSE'S *George Selwyn and his Contemporaries*, iii. 136.

[3] Brookes's.

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and said in his most expressive tone, 'O sir, don't interrupt Mr Wilberforce, he could not be better employed.'"[1] Everybody knows that Charles Fox spent at Brookes's or at Newmarket all the time "which was not devoted to the House of Commons,"[2] that in his thirst for excitement, though an excellent player "at whist and at picquet," he preferred "games of chance, particularly faro," that "to this pursuit, or rather rage, he sacrificed a sinecure place of £2,000 a year for life, the Clerkship of the Pells in Ireland, a fine estate situated at Kingsgate in the Isle of Thanet," and, over and above these losses, incurred a debt of £140,000, which had to be discharged from his father's own property.[3] The ruin begun by gambling was often consummated by intemperance. Horace Walpole speaks in 1772 of Charles Fox as just arrived from Newmarket, having sat up drinking all night and not been in bed, yet making an admirable speech in the House.[4] Sheridan, at sixty, reminded Wraxall of the "companions of

[1] *Life of Wilberforce* by his sons, 1838, i., 16-8.
[2] WRAXALL'S *Historical Memoirs*, ed. 1904, pp. 343-4.
[3] *Memorials of Ch. J. Fox*, 1854, i., 92.
[4] *Letters*, viii., 157.

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Ulysses who tasted of Circe's charmed cup,' so striking was "the metamorphosis produced in his appearance by repeated and habitual intoxication."[1] Amidst these wild excesses, the "Blue Stocking" parties formed a little oasis of wisdom, which the impetuous youth of the time avoided, in their mad chase after more stirring scenes.

Englishmen are, as we know, born individualists. Singularity, eccentricity even, is with them a quality, not a defect. As Walpole says, they "establish a right to their own way,"[2] and, if denied, they take it. Their literati never flocked to the Capital, as the French have done at all times, especially in the eighteenth century. "The circle in London," Wraxall remarks, "was, from various causes, necessarily much more contracted than in France, where every person distinguished by talents, with few exceptions, commonly resided altogether in Paris." Very different was the case in England. Johnson, for many years domesticated with Mrs Thrale at Streatham, devoted, of course, the greatest part of his leisure to her suburban

[1] *Posthumous Memoirs*, ed. 1836, i., 39.
[2] *Letters*, vi., 312.

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assemblies; Goldsmith, though occasionally seen at Mrs Vesey's, had no talent for conversation, and was chiefly remarkable for his simplicity and absent-mindedness; Cambridge, a lesser star, lived at Twickenham, Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill; Hannah More paid only flying visits to London, and Fanny Burney too soon retired from society to the depressing atmosphere of a Court. Gibbon "never emulated to be a member of these assemblies and never attended them. Like Burke, he looked more to politics, than to letters, for his substantial recompense,"[1] and, when deprived of his income as one of the Lords Commissioners of trade, he definitively left London for Lausanne. Hume, Adam Smith, Robertson and Beattie resided at Edinburgh or Aberdeen, and seldom travelled southwards. Of guests so dispersed, the attendance could be but casual, and the invitations to the Blue Stocking assemblies partook of the same character. Neither Mrs Montagu nor Mrs Vesey ever seem to have had stated days, on which their friends could rely upon finding at their houses a breakfast, or dinner, and conversation afterwards. In

[1] WRAXALL'S *Historical Memoirs*, ed. 1904, pp. 97-8.

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Paris, on the contrary, a man of letters, provided he was something of a philosopher, could regularly spend his week in the following manner: on Sundays and Thursdays, he dined at the Baron d'Holbach's; on Mondays and Wednesdays, at Mme Geoffrin's; on Tuesdays, at M. Helvétius'; on Fridays, at Mme Necker's; and every evening, between five and nine o'clock, he was expected at Mlle de Lespinasse's.[1] He thus found his life mapped out for him with all the precision and symmetry of a French garden; had he gone to London, he would have been disturbed in his habits by a confusion and irregularity equal to those of an English park.

And, to conclude, it must be acknowledged that neither Mrs Vesey nor even Mrs Montagu could for one moment compete in amplitude of talents and in power of attraction with their illustrious contemporaries, the Marquise du Deffand, Mme Geoffrin and Mlle de Lespinasse. With the last named of these, Mrs Vesey possessed in common a singular personal charm, a sweet forgetfulness of self and lack of vanity, that made her take delight

[1] STE. BEUVE, *Causeries du Lundi*, ii., 125-6 (Mlle de Lespinasse, 20 mai 1850).

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in the wit of others, without intruding her own. But what a contrast appears between the excessive simplicity, we might almost say the intellectual debility, of the English lady, and the ardent nature of Mlle de Lespinasse, whose sympathy for others was but a softened reflex of the flame that burned within her, and at last consumed her! Mrs Montagu's acquaintance with the world was probably equal to Mme du Deffand's and Mme Geoffrin's. But in no passage of her printed correspondence can we discover any trace of their penetrating insight into the human heart, of their gift for character-painting, ruthlessly sarcastic in Mme du Deffand, familiar and almost humoristic in Mme Geoffrin. An egotist by temperament and education, Mrs Montagu could hardly go out of herself and see deep into others. Her observation played on the surface of men and things; she understood their outward shows better than their hidden meanings. She loved all that attracts notice; she aimed at dazzling the world with her diamonds and her accomplishments. Her exertions obtained the success they deserved. The splendour of her receptions, the range of her learning, superior even to Mme du

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Deffand's, were acknowledged by all her contemporaries. And alone among the women of fashion at that time, she claimed and won a place as a professed author and critic.

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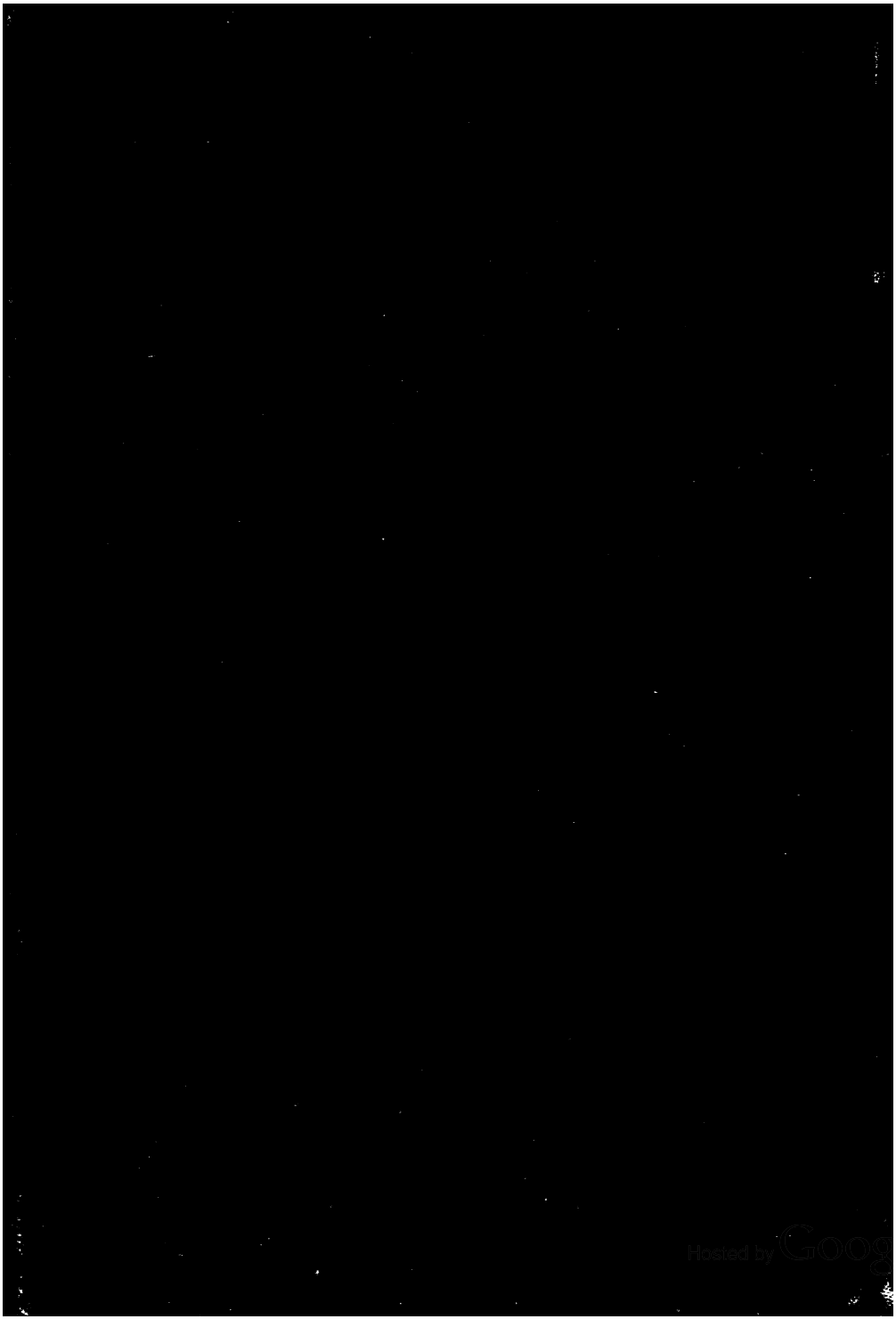
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